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SERMONS

ON SEVERAL

SUBJECTS *and* OCCASIONS,

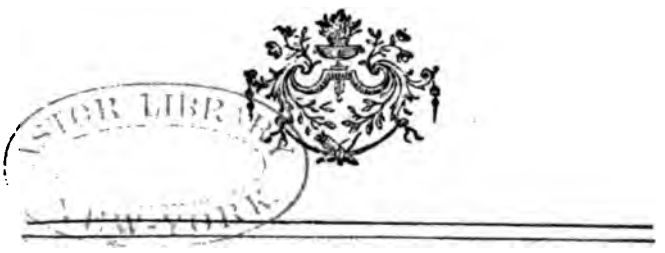
By the moſt Reverend

Dr. *JOHN TILLOTSON*,

LATE

Lord Archbiſhop of *Canterbury*.

VOLUME *the* EIGHTH.



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SERMON CXXXI.

Concerning our imitation of the divine perfections.

MATT. v. 48.

Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

IN theſe words we have, firſt, the abſolute perfection of the divine nature ſuppoſed, not only in thoſe before mentioned, of goodneſs, and mercy, and patience; but in all other excellencies whatſoever. SERM. CXXXI.

Secondly, The perfection of GOD is propounded as a pattern for our imitation.

In the handling of theſe two particulars, I propounded to proceed in this method.

I. To ſhew how we are to conceive of the divine perfection.

II. To lay down ſome rules, by which we may rectify and govern our opinions concerning the attributes and perfections of GOD.

III. To ſhew how far we are to imitate the perfections of GOD, and particularly what thoſe divine qualities are which our SAVIOUR doth here more eſpecially propound to our imitation.

IV. To clear the true meaning of this precept; and to ſhew that the duty here intended by our SAVIOUR is not impoſſible to us; and then to draw ſome uſeful inferences from the whole.

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The two firſt I have already ſpoken; to I now proceed to the third particular, which is, to ſhew how far we are to imitate the perfections of GOD, and particularly what thoſe divine qualities are, which our SAVIOUR doth here more eſpecially propound to our imitation. For though theſe words do ſuppoſe the abſolute perfection of the divine nature, yet becauſe there are ſeveral perfections of GOD which are incommunicable, and a creature, as ſuch, is utterly incapable of them, theſe cannot be ſuppoſed to be intended for a pattern to us. As the neceſſity and independency of the divine nature; and the ſelf-ſufficiency of it to his own happineſs; to be the original cauſe of all things; and conſequently ſupreme Lord and Governor; the immenſity and eternity of his being; theſe, and perhaps ſeveral other perfections, are incommunicable to a creature; and it would be an unſufferable pride, and a kind of high treaſon againſt the divine Majeſty, and a ſottiſh ignorance of the neceſſary bounds and limits of our own ſtate, as we are creatures, to think to reſemble GOD in theſe excellencies, of which the condition of a creature is utterly incapable. This was the ſin of Lucifer; an ambition to ſtep into the throne of GOD, and to be like the moſt High.

So that in our imitation of the divine perfection, we are to keep within the ſtation of creatures, not affecting an independency and ſovereignty like the moſt High, and to be omnipotent as he is, "to "have an arm like GOD, and to thunder with a "voice like him," as the expreſſion is in Job: but to endeavour to reſemble him, *pro modulo creaturæ*, "according to the rate and capacity of a creature," in thoſe divine qualities, and in ſuch meaſures and,

degrees

degrees, as our finite and dependent nature is capable of. SERM. CXXXI.

More eſpecially and chiefly in the moral perfections of the divine nature, ſuch as are his goodneſs, and mercy, and patience, his juſtice, and truth, and faithfulneſs; theſe, and only theſe, the ſcripture ſeems to comprehend under the name of holineſs; not all the excellencies of the divine nature in general, but thoſe which we call moral excellencies and perfections, ſuch as thoſe which I have named; for with theſe, and hardly with any other, is the holineſs of GOD joined in ſcripture, as "holy "and righteous, holy and true," &c. And therefore when GOD ſays, "be ye holy, for I am holy," it ſignifies that we are to imitate GOD, in his goodneſs, and mercy, and patience, and righteouſneſs, and faithfulneſs, and truth; for theſe are the holineſs of the divine nature, which ſet him at the greateſt diſtance from that which we call moral impurity and ſin.

For that which our SAVIOUR here in the text more peculiarly recommends to our imitation, is the goodneſs of GOD, of which his mercy and patience are two eminent branches. The mercy of GOD is his goodneſs to thoſe that are in miſery, or are liable to it. The patience of GOD is his mercy in ſparing thoſe who have deſerved puniſhment, and are liable to it. And the goodneſs of GOD is then greateſt, when it is exerciſed towards the evil and unthankful; thoſe who are ſo far from deſerving it, that they have given great and juſt provocations to the contrary. And this affectionate temper of mind, which is ſo remarkable in GOD towards the unworthy and unthankful ſons of men, our SAVIOUR recommends to our imitation here in the text. "Be

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"ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which "is in heaven is perfect." Be ye therefore; this particle of inference, therefore, hath a plain relation to ſomething ſpoken before; and if we look back to ver. 44. we ſhall find our SAVIOUR there enjoining his diſciples "to love their enemies, to bleſs "them that curſe them, to do good to them that "hate them, and to pray for thoſe that deſpight-"fully uſe them, and perſecute them." And by what other argument doth he inforce the practice of this difficult duty, but by telling us, that this is to be like GOD, to be good to the evil and unthankful, ver. 45. "That ye may be the children "of your heavenly Father, who maketh his ſun to "riſe on the evil and the good; and his rain to "fall on the juſt, and on the unjuſt." GOD is good to all, and exerciſeth great mercy and patience even towards the evil, and unjuſt. And then he concludes, that if perfection itſelf be fit to be a pattern, we ſhould labour after theſe qualities; "Be "ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which "is in heaven is perfect." So that though the univerſal perfection of the divine nature be here ſuppoſed, yet the attributes of his goodneſs, and mercy, and patience, are here particularly pointed at, and propounded to us for our pattern; and the precept of imitating the divine perfection is more eſpecially to be underſtood of thoſe perfections which our SAVIOUR had been diſcourſing of before, viz. the goodneſs and mercy of GOD. And that this is undoubtedly ſo, is evident from St. Luke's rendring this precept, Ch. vi. 36. "Be ye therefore οἰκτίρ-"μονες, *benefici*, ready to do good, full of kind-"neſs and benignity; merciful, as your Father which "is in heaven is merciful;" that is, endeavour you

to

to be ſuch as I have deſcribed GOD to be. And this SERM. CXXXI. St. Matthew calls perfection; becauſe the goodneſs of GOD is his great perfection, and the glory of the divine nature, that which reflects a luſtre and beauty upon all his other attributes, and takes off the terror of them. From all which it is plain, what thoſe perfections of the divine nature are, which our SAVIOUR doth here particularly recommend to our imitation. I come now, in the

Fourth and laſt place, To clear the true meaning of this precept; and to ſhew, that the duty here required, and intended by our SAVIOUR (when he ſays, "Be ye perfect, as your Father which is in "heaven is perfect") is not impoſſible to us. And to this purpoſe, be pleaſed to conſider theſe three or four things.

1. That our imitation of GOD is certainly reſtrained to the communicable perfections of GOD, and ſuch as creatures are capable of, as I have ſhewn before. For it is ſo far from being a duty to affect or attempt to be like GOD in his peculiar perfections, that it was, probably, the ſin of the apoſtate angels.

2. Our imitation of the divine perfections, which are communicable to creatures, is likewiſe to be reſtrained to ſuch degrees of theſe perfections, as creatures are capable of. For no creature can ever be ſo perfectly good, as GOD is; nor partake of any other excellency, in that tranſcendant degree, in which the divine nature is poſſeſſed of it.

3. But there is no manner of inconvenience in having a pattern propounded to us of ſo great perfection, as is above our reach to attain to; and there may be great advantages in it. The way to excel in any kind is, *optima quæque exempla ad imitandum*

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proponere, "to propoſe the higheſt and moſt perfect "examples to our imitation." No man can write after too perfect and good a copy; and though he can never reach the perfection of it, yet he is like to learn more, than by one leſs perfect. He that aims at the heavens, which yet he is ſure to come ſhort of, is like to ſhoot higher than he that aims at a mark within his reach.

Beſides, that the excellency of the pattern, as it leaves room for continual improvement, ſo it kindles ambition, and makes men ſtrain and contend to the utmoſt to do better: and tho' he can never hope to equal the example before him, yet he will endeavour to come as near it as he can. So that a perfect pattern is no hindrance, but an advantage rather to our improvement in any kind.

4. If any thing can be ſuppoſed to be our duty, which is abſolutely beyond our power, a precept of this nature may with as much reaſon be ſuppoſed to be ſo, as any thing that can be inſtanced in: becauſe in ſuch a caſe, if we do our beſt, and be continually preſſing forward towards the mark, though we can never reach it, yet we do very commendably; and whatever the law may require to try and raiſe our obedience, yet in all equitable interpretation, ſuch a will and endeavour will be acceptable with GOD for the deed. For if the perfection of the law do really exceed our ability, and be beyond the poſſibility of our performance, the aſſurance we have of GOD's goodneſs will ſufficiently ſecure us from any danger and prejudice upon that account. And we may reaſonably preſume, that to do all we can towards the fulfilling of this precept, will be as acceptable to GOD, and as beneficial to ourſelves, as if our power had been greater, and we had perfect-

ly

ly fulfilled it. If our heavenly Father, to try the readineſs and chearfulneſs of our obedience, bid us do that which he knows we cannot do, though we can do ſomething towards it, we may be ſure that he will be very well pleaſed when he ſees, that in obedience to him we have done all that we could. And we may in this caſe reaſon as our SAVIOUR does; "If we that are evil would deal thus with our chil- "dren, how much more ſhall our heavenly Father?" The goodneſs of GOD ſignifies very little, if it does not ſignify this, that in any inſtance of real and unqueſtionable goodneſs, GOD is much better than any father upon earth. SERM. CXXXI.

However at the worſt, that wherein we fall ſhort of the perfection of the law, may be ſupplied on our part, by an humble acknowledgment of our own weakneſs and imperfection, and on GOD's part, by mercy and forgiveneſs, for the ſake of the perfect obedience of our bleſſed Redeemer. This is the leaſt benefit we can expect in this caſe from the grace, and mercy, and equity of the goſpel.

5. And laſtly, which will fully clear this matter, this precept does not oblige us to come up to a perfect equality with the pattern propounded to us, but only imports a vigorous imitation of it; that we be perpetually aſcending and climbing up higher, ſtill advancing from one degree of goodneſs to another, and continually aſpiring after a nearer reſemblance to GOD: and this certainly is poſſible to us, to endeavour to be as like GOD as we can, in this weak and imperfect ſtate.

Whereas any equality with GOD, even in the communicable attributes of his goodneſs, and mercy, and patience, is not only impoſſible to us in this ſtate of ſin and imperfection, but above the condition of a crea-

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a creature, even of "the ſpirits of juſt men made "perfect," and of the higheſt angels in glory: for their perfection is not abſolute, but in compariſon with our preſent ſtate. And I think there is no great reaſon to doubt, but that the bleſſed ſpirits above, who continually behold the face of their Father, are ſtill writing after this copy, which is here propounded to us; and endeavouring "to be per-"fect, as their Father which is in heaven is perfect;" ſtill aſpiring after a nearer and more perfect reſemblance of GOD, whoſe goodneſs and mercy is ſo far beyond, and before that of any creature, that they may be for ever approaching nearer to it, and yet never overtake it.

And this ſeems to be no inconſiderable ingredient, and enhancement of the happineſs of heaven, that the holineſs of good men (which is the ſimilitude of GOD) is never at a ſtand, nor at its full growth and period; but that the glorified ſaints (yea and bleſſed angels too) may be continually growing and improving, and they themſelves ſtill become better and happier to all eternity. And this in my apprehenſion is no undervaluing the happineſs of heaven, that it is not ſo perfect at firſt, as it ſhall be afterwards; becauſe it is granted on all hands, that the happineſs of thoſe good ſouls, who are already in bliſs, ſhall be more perfect and complete at the reſurrection. And why may it not then be continually increaſing, and be augmented ſtill more and more, without any ſtint or final period of its perfection? In this world we are apt to faint in a long courſe of goodneſs, and to be weary of well doing. But in the other ſtate, when men ſhall be ſtrongly byaſſed to goodneſs, and have nothing to pull them back, it will then be ſo far from being a trouble, that methinks it

ſhould be a mighty pleaſure to the bleſſed, to find that there is no end of their doing good, and becoming better. For if conformity to GOD be the ground and foundation of all happineſs, then our bleſſedneſs will advance proportionably, as we grow more and more like to him. This, I confeſs, were a diſmal conſideration, to think that in heaven we ſhould be liable to relapſe, to go backward, or fall from that holy and happy ſtate. But this is a comfortable conſideration, that our holineſs and happineſs ſhall never be at a ſtand, that it is ſecure ſo far as it goes, and that we cannot loſe what we have once attained, as we may do in this world. This, methinks, ſhould be a trouble to no man, that as good and happy as he is at firſt, he ſhall ſtill be better and better, more and more happy without end. SERM. CXXXI.

But be that as it will, and as GOD pleaſeth (for we do but talk in the dark about our future ſtate) this is certain, that an equality with GOD in any of his perfections is not to be attained by any creature, and therefore cannot be thought to be the meaning of this precept: But that which our SAVIOUR requires, is a vigorous imitation of this pattern; that we have this example of the divine perfection always before us, and that we be continually endeavouring, as much as in us lies, to bring ourſelves to the neareſt reſemblance of GOD, that poſſibly we can. And if this be our ſincere care and ſtudy, we need not doubt but that it will find acceptance with GOD, and that he will be graciouſly pleaſed to eſteem us for his children; and if there need a pardon for it, that GOD will forgive us where we fall ſhort of the perfection of that pattern, which we can never imitate to perfection.

And happy were it for us, if this were all the ground of our fear and trouble, that when we had done

SERM. CXXII. done all we could, we muſt ſtill fall much ſhort of the perfection of GOD's law, and the duty therein laid upon us. Alas! which of us does near ſo much as we can, and is not conſcious to himſelf that it is through his own fault and neglect, that he is ſo unlike his heavenly Father in goodneſs and mercy, in righteouſneſs and true holineſs; and that he ſtill partakes in ſo great a meaſure of thoſe, not only unreaſonable and brutiſh, but even deviliſh paſſions of malice and hatred, of rage and cruelty, of impatience and implacable revenge; and that theſe ungodlike qualities do ſo frequently prevail upon us, and have ſo much dominion over us!

We are ſo far from being what we ought, in theſe and many other reſpects, that we are far from what we might be, if we would mind our duty with care and conſcience, and make it our ſincere endeavour to ſubdue ourſelves to a conformity to GOD, and to a perfect holineſs in his fear.

Would we but often ſet GOD before our eyes, and repreſent to ourſelves thoſe excellent and amiable perfections of the divine nature, which are ſo comfortable and beneficial to us, and to which we ſtand ſo infinitely obliged, his goodneſs and mercy and patience, upon which all our hopes of happineſs do depend, and to which we are indebted, that we are not miſerable paſt recovery; that goodneſs and patience which he continually exerciſeth towards us, (for we provoke him every day) and exerciſeth towards us, on purpoſe to endear thoſe perfections to us, from which we reap ſo much comfort and advantage; that by the pattern of perfection itſelf, and the example of him who is ſo much above us, ſo no ways obliged to us, nor tied by any intereſt to be concerned for us; and who being happy in himſelf, neither

hopes nor fears any thing from us: I ſay, by an example that has all theſe advantages, we might be provoked to be ſo affected towards one another, (who have mutual obligations one to another, and mutual expectations of good or evil one from another) as we have always found GOD to be towards us, and as we deſire he ſhould ſtill continue; and miſerable creatures are we, whenever he ceaſeth to be ſo: and we have reaſon to fear he will ceaſe to be ſo, if this example of his goodneſs and patience towards us, do not transform us into the image of the divine perfections, and prevail upon us to imitate thoſe excellencies, which we have ſo much reaſon to approve and admire, and be in love withal. SERM. CXXXI.

Theſe conſiderations, taken both from ingenuity and intereſt, ſhould awaken our ſloth, and ſtir up our moſt reſolute and vigorous endeavours after that perfection which our SAVIOUR here requires, and make us aſhamed of our lazy complaints, that our duty is ſet ſo high, that the endeavours of our whole life cannot reach it; when yet we have hardly made one ſtep towards it, and are ſo remiſs and unconcerned about it, as if we could do it at any time with the greateſt eaſe; and at an hour's warning, before we leave the world, could fulfill this precept of our LORD, of "being perfect, as our Father which is "in heaven is perfect."

And yet, let me tell you, ſo far as any of us are from reſembling our heavenly Father in ſome good degree and meaſure, ſo far are we diſtant from heaven, and the temper of the bleſſed; ſo far are we utterly unqualified for the bliſsful ſight and enjoyment of GOD: for unleſs we be firſt like him, we cannot ſee him as he is: only "the pure in heart ſhall ſee "GOD," and therefore "every man that has this

"hope

SERM. CXXXI. "hope in him," ſhould "purify himſelf even as "he is pure."

And thus I have, as briefly as I could, diſpatched the four things I propounded for the explication of this text; namely, how we are to conceive of the divine perfections, and to give ſome rules to regulate and govern our opinions concerning the attributes and perfections of GOD; to explain the extent of this duty, and vindicate the poſſibility of it.

All that now remains, is to draw ſome uſeful inferences from this diſcourſe which I have made; and they ſhall be theſe two.

I. That the ſtrongeſt and ſureſt reaſonings in religion, are grounded upon the eſſential perfections of GOD.

II. That the trueſt and moſt ſubſtantial practice of religion, conſiſts in the imitation of GOD.

I. That the ſtrongeſt and ſureſt reaſonings in religion, are grounded upon the eſſential perfections of GOD; ſo that even divine revelation itſelf doth ſuppoſe theſe for its foundation, and can ſignify nothing to us, unleſs theſe be firſt known and believed. Unleſs we be firſt perſuaded of the providence of GOD, and his particular care of mankind, why ſhould we believe that he would make any revelation of himſelf to men? Unleſs it be naturally known to us, that GOD is true, what foundation is there for the belief of his word? And what ſignifies the laws and promiſes of GOD, unleſs natural light do firſt aſſure us of his ſovereign authority and faithfulneſs? So that the principles of natural religion are the foundation of that which is revealed; and therefore, in reaſon, nothing can be admitted to be a revelation from GOD, which plainly contradicts his eſſential perfection, and, conſequently, if any pretends divine

vine revelation for this doctrine, that God hath from all eternity abſolutely decreed the eternal ruin of the greateſt part of mankind, without any reſpect to the ſins and demerits of men, I am as certain that this doctrine cannot be of God, as I am ſure that God is good and juſt; becauſe this grates upon the notion that mankind have of goodneſs and juſtice. This is that which no good man would do, and therefore cannot be believed of infinite goodneſs; and therefore if "an apoſtle or angel from heaven" teach any doctrine which plainly overthrows the goodneſs and juſtice of God, "let him be accurſed." For every man hath greater aſſurance that God is good and juſt, than he can have of any ſubtle ſpeculations about predeſtination and the decrees of God. SERM. CXXXI.

And for the ſame reaſon I cannot believe, upon the pretended authority or infallability of any man or church in the world, that God would not have men underſtand their public prayers, and the leſſons of ſcripture which are read to them. A leſſon not to be underſtood is nonſenſe: a leſſon is ſomething to be learned, which how it can be without being underſtood, is hard to comprehend.

And as little can I believe, upon the authority of any perſon or church whatſoever, that God ſhould reveal his will to men in the holy ſcriptures, with a deſign to have it hid, and locked up from the generality of mankind in an unknown tongue. And much leſs can I believe (which yet is the expreſs doctrine of the council of Trent) that the ſaving efficacy of the ſacrament depends upon the intention of the prieſt. Which is to ſay, that though people believe, and live never ſo well, they may be damned by ſholes and whole pariſhes together, at the pleaſure of the prieſt, and for no other reaſon, but becauſe he is ſo wicked

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wicked as not to intend to ſave them. Can any man believe this, that hath any tolerable notion of GOD's goodneſs? May we not in this caſe appeal, as Abraham did, to the goodneſs and juſtice of GOD, and expoſtulate with greater reaſon than he did, much after the ſame manner, "Wilt thou deſtroy "the righteous for the wicked? that be far from "thee to do after this manner." To damn the righteous for the wicked, and that righteous people ſhould lie at the mercy of a wicked prieſt, to be damned or ſaved at his pleaſure, "that be far from "thee; ſhall not the judge of all the earth do right?" And can there be a greater affront to the goodneſs and juſtice of GOD, than to imagine he ſhould deal with men after this manner? If this be to do right, there is no poſſibility of doing wrong.

And to give but one inſtance more: I can never believe, upon the authority of any man, or church whatſoever, that our SAVIOUR, in the celebration of his laſt ſupper, did with his own hands give away his own natural body into the hands of his diſciples, and give his blood ſhed, before it was ſhed; that the whole doctrine of Chriſtianity ſhould mainly rely upon the evidence of miracles, the aſſurance of which depends upon the certainty of ſenſe; and yet that an eſſential part of that doctrine ſhould overthrow the certainty of ſenſe. I can never while I live believe theſe two things, that the laſt thing our SAVIOUR did before his death, ſhould be to teach his diſciples not to believe their own ſenſes, as he muſt do if he taught them tranſubſtantiation; and that the very firſt thing he did after he was riſen from the dead, ſhould be to teach them the quite contrary, by appealing to the certainty of ſenſe for the proof of his reſurrection; for when they doubted of his reſurrection,

rection, Luke xxiv. 38. "He ſaid unto them, Why SERM. CXXXI.
"are ye troubled? and why do thoughts ariſe in
"your hearts? Behold my hands and my feet, that
"it is I myſelf: handle me, and ſee, for a ſpirit
"hath not fleſh and bones, as ye ſee me have." If this be a good argument, that it was a real body which they ſaw, becauſe they ſaw and felt fleſh and bones; is it not as good an argument on the other ſide, that what they ſaw in the ſacrament was not his real and natural body, becauſe they could neither ſee nor handle fleſh and bones? So that I cannot believe tranſubſtantiation, unleſs I can believe that truth itſelf can contradict and deſtroy itſelf.

You ſee of what uſe it is to have right and ſteady apprehenſions of the divine perfections; that, theſe being laid for a foundation, we may upon all occaſions have recourſe to them, and govern our opinions and reaſonings in religion, about all doubtful matters, by ſuch principles as are clear and unqueſtionable. The

II. Inference is, that the trueſt and moſt ſubſtantial practice of religion, conſiſts in the imitation of the divine perfections, eſpecially the moral perfections of the divine nature, which the ſcripture is wont to comprehend under the name of holineſs; and ſuch are the goodneſs, and mercy, and patience of GOD, his juſtice, and truth, and faithfulneſs. To imitate GOD in theſe is true religion; or as St. James expreſſes it, "pure religion, and undefiled," ἀμίαντος, without any flaw or blemiſh, alluding to precious ſtones, the greateſt commendation of which is to be clear and without flaw. *Religio eſt, imitari quem colis*, "that is religion, to imitate him "whom we worſhip." This the heathens, by the light

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light of nature, did diſcover to be the great end of religion, and the beſt worſhip of the deity, to be like GOD. Pythagoras was wont to ſay, "that we "honour GOD moſt, when we are moſt like him in "the temper and diſpoſition of our minds;" and Plato to the ſame purpoſe, "that the height and per-"fection of goodneſs, is to reſemble GOD, as near "as is poſſible; and that we reſemble GOD, in be-"ing juſt, and holy, and wiſe." So likewiſe Hierocles, "that a good man imitates GOD, in the "meaſures of love and friendſhip, who hates no "man, and extends his benignity to all mankind." Plutarch hath an excellent diſcourſe about the patience of GOD towards ſinners, and gives this as one reaſon why GOD doth not preſently puniſh offenders; "that he might give an example to us of "gentleneſs and patience, and check the fury and "violence of men in revenging injuries upon one "another; which nothing will do more effectually, "than to conſider that gentleneſs and forbearance "are an imitation of the divine perfection." And then he cites an excellent ſaying of Plato, "that "GOD manifeſted himſelf, and diſplayed his per-"fections in the world, for our imitation; true vir-"tue being nothing elſe, but an imitation of the "divine nature. For there is no greater benefit "man can receive from GOD's hand, than to be-"come virtuous by the imitation and purſuit of "thoſe excellencies and perfections which are in "GOD." Seneca likewiſe hath many paſſages to this purpoſe, *inter viros bonos ac Deum amicitia eſt, imò etiam neceſſitudo & ſimilitudo*, "between GOD and "good men there is a friendſhip, yea, and an inti-"macy and likeneſs;" and that a virtuous man is *diſcipulus æmulatorque & vera progenies Dei*, "a diſ-"ciple

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" ciple and imitator, and the very genuine off-
" ſpring of GOD." So that the light of nature and the reaſon of mankind, have always placed the perfection of religion in the imitation of the divine excellencies and perfections.

And this is very agreeable to the language and ſenſe of the holy ſcriptures, which every where make the practice of religion to conſiſt in our conformity to GOD, and the laws which he hath given us; which are nothing elſe but a tranſcript of his nature. The great buſineſs of religion is to do the will of GOD, and " this is the will of GOD, our " ſanctification;" and our ſanctification is our conformity to the holineſs of GOD; and this is the ſcope of the general exhortations of ſcripture, to perſuade us to holineſs, that is, to an imitation of the moral perfections of the divine nature. 2 Cor. vii. 1. " Having therefore theſe promiſes, dearly be-
" loved; let us cleanſe ourſelves from all filthineſs
" of fleſh and ſpirit, and perfect holineſs in the fear
" of GOD." 1 Pet. i. 15, 16. " As he which hath
" called you is holy, ſo be ye holy in all manner of
" converſation, becauſe it is written, be ye holy,
" for I am holy." 2 Pet. i. 3, 4. ſpeaking of the Chriſtian religion, which he calls " the knowledge
" of him who hath called us to glory and virtue,
" whereby alſo (ſays he) are given unto us exceed-
" ing great and precious promiſes, that by theſe
" we might be partakers of a divine nature, hav-
" ing eſcaped the corruption that is in the world
" through luſt." So that the holineſs the goſpel deſigns to bring us to, is a participation of the divine nature, which we can no otherwiſe partake of, but by an imitation of the divine perfections. This is that which the ſcripture expreſſes to us by the

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terms of regeneration, the new man, and the new creature. And therefore thoſe who are converted from a wicked and ſinful ſtate, and reclaimed to goodneſs, are ſaid "to put on the new man, which "after God is created in righteouſneſs, and the ho-"lineſs of truth." Eph. iv. 23. "To be renew-"ed after the image of him that created us." Coloſ. iii. 10. This is to be the ſons and children of God, to "imitate and reſemble God in our diſpoſitions and "manners." Eph. v. 1. "Be ye therefore, μιμηταὶ "τοῦ θεοῦ, imitators of God, as dear children." Philip ii. 15. "That ye may be blameleſs and ſin-"cere, the ſons of God without rebuke, in the midſt "of a crooked and perverſe nation." 1 John iii. 10. "In this the children of God are manifeſt, and "the children of the devil; whoſoever doth not "righteouſneſs is not of God." There have been great enquires concerning the marks of a child of God; this is the true character, and that which in effect comprehends all others, our imitation and reſemblance of God in thoſe perfections, wherein he is ſet forth for a pattern to us. And in this mainly conſiſts the practice both of natural religion, and of true Chriſtianity.

But does not religion conſiſt very much in the duties of God's worſhip, in the exerciſe of piety and devotion, in conſtant and frequent prayers to God, and in the celebration of his goodneſs by praiſe and thankſgiving, in reading and hearing, and meditating upon God's word, in faſting and abſtinence, and keeping our bodies in ſubjection to our ſpirits, and in frequent receiving of the holy ſacrament? to this I anſwer, that religion doth conſiſt very much in the due performance of theſe duties, and they are unqueſtionable and neceſſary parts of religion, and

the means appointed by GOD for the begetting and increaſing in us ſuch diſpoſitions of mind, as render us moſt like to GOD, and for the production of all the fruits of goodneſs and holineſs and righteouſneſs in our lives. SERM. CXXXI.

But then it is to be conſidered, that theſe exerciſes of piety and devotion are but the means of religion, and not the ultimate end and deſign of it. All theſe do but ſerve to bring us to a nearer reſemblance of GOD; and where they fail of this end, and are performed for their own ſakes only, and we reſt in them, without aiming at any thing further, they loſe their nature; becauſe they are not uſed as means, but reſted in, as if they were the end of religion. And it is to be feared there are many which fall into this fatal miſtake about religion, and think that if they do but ſerve GOD in their families, and go to church, and behave themſelves there with devotion and reverence, and at certain ſeaſons receive the ſacrament, they are truly religious, and very good Chriſtians; when all this while they take no care to improve themſelves in real goodneſs, by an inward conformity of their minds to GOD, and the real reformation and amendment of their lives, by mortifying their luſts, and ſubduing their appetites and paſſions to the laws of reaſon and religion, by "putting on, as the elect of GOD, bowels of kind-"neſs;" by being true and faithful, righteous and juſt, patient and merciful, "as their Father which "is in heaven is" ſo; and by "forbearing one "another" in caſe of provocation, and "forgiv-"ing one another, even as GOD for CHRIST's ſake "hath forgiven us; by purifying themſelves as GOD "is pure," and endeavouring to "be holy in all "manner of converſation, as he who hath called

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" them is holy;" when all this while they are as covetous, and earthly-minded, and, to ſerve their covetouſneſs, will ſtrain a point of truth or juſtice, and hardly do an act of charity in their whole lives, but what is extorted from them by mere importunity, or ſome ſuch urgent neceſſity, in point of decency and reputation, that for ſhame of the world they know not how to avoid it; when their paſſions are as fierce and ungoverned, their hearts as full of gall and bitterneſs, their tongues of ſlander and evil-ſpeaking, their humours as proud, and ſurly, and cenſorious, as theirs can be who are openly prophane, and ſeem to neglect and deſpiſe all religion: and yet becauſe they ſerve GOD (as they call it) and make an external appearance of piety and devotion, are good church-men, and attend upon the ordinances of GOD, they think they have diſcharged the whole buſineſs of religion admirably well, and are very good children of GOD, and in a ſtate of great grace and favour with him. Whereas the performance of all theſe duties, and the uſe of all theſe means ſeparated from that which is the great end of religion, the conformity of ourſelves to GOD, in thoſe qualities and diſpoſitions which I have mentioned, is ſo far from finding acceptance with GOD, that is is an abomination to him. So GOD every where declares in ſcripture, telling us, that " the prayer of the " wicked is an abomination to the LORD," and that he diſdains to be praiſed by men of unhallowed lips and lives; and that unleſs with " the praiſes we of- " fer to him, we order our converſation aright, we " ſhall not ſee the ſalvation of GOD." With what contempt does he ſpeak of this formal and external religion, without the power of it upon our hearts and lives! " To what purpoſe is the multitude of

" your

" your ſacrafices to me? Will the LORD be pleaſed " with thouſands of rams, and ten thouſands of " rivers of oil? He hath ſhewed thee, O man, " what is good; and what doth the LORD require " of thee, but to do juſtly, and to love mercy, and " to walk humbly with thy GOD? Is not this the " faſt which I have choſen, to break the bands of " wickedneſs, and to let the oppreſſed go free; to " deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring " the poor, that are caſt out, to thine houſe; when " thou ſeeſt the naked, that thou cover him, and " that thou hide not thyſelf from thine own fleſh."

Nor is it hearing of the word that will avail us, unleſs we be doers of it. " Bleſſed are they (ſays " our SAVIOUR) that hear the word of GOD, and " keep it. He that heareth theſe ſayings of mine, " and doth them, ſhall be likened to a wiſe man, " who hath built his houſe upon a rock." Nor will bare receiving the ſacrament recommend us to GOD; but performing the obligation, which thereby we take upon ourſelves, to abſtain from all ſin and wickedneſs; otherwiſe " we tread under foot " the ſon of GOD, and prophane the blood of the " covenant, whereby we ſhould be ſanctified, as if " it were an unholy thing." Can any man think that to be religion, which has no effect upon the lives of men, which does not teach them to govern their words and actions, who reads thoſe plain words of St. James? " If any man among you ſeem to be " religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but de- " ceiveth his own heart, that man's religion is vain. " Pure religion and undefiled before GOD and the " Father is this, to viſit the fatherleſs and widows " in their affliction, and to keep himſelf unſpotted " from the world." When religion produceth

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theſe real effects, then the means of religion do truly ſerve the end of it, and we are not only "hearers "of the word, but doers of it," and "ſhall be "bleſſed in our deed."

So that as there is an obligation upon us to uſe the means of religion, which GOD hath inſtituted, with great care and conſcience; ſo we ſhould chiefly mind that, which is the end of all religion, which is to make us partakers of a divine nature, and make us like to GOD, eſpecially in thoſe amiable and excellent qualities, which are the glory and beauty of the divine nature, his benignity and goodneſs, his mercy and patience. Theſe, becauſe they are the primary perfections of GOD, are the principal duties both of natural and revealed religion, and of an eternal and indiſpenſable obligation; becauſe they have their foundation in the nature of GOD, which is fixt and unalterable. And all poſitive inſtitutions, when they come in competition with theſe, are to ſtoop and vail to them. Natural and moral duties, eſpecially thoſe of goodneſs and mercy, and charity, are ſo ſtrongly bound upon us, that nothing in any revealed religion can cancel the obligation of them, or juſtify the violation of theſe great and indiſpenſable laws. Our SAVIOUR in his religion has declared nothing to the prejudice of them: but, on the contrary, has ſtraitned our obligation to them, as much as is poſſible: "The ſon of man came not "to deſtroy mens lives, but to ſave them;" ſo that they "know not what manner of ſpirit they are "of," who think to pleaſe GOD by hating men, who are made after the image of GOD, and "by kill-"ing one another, to do him good ſervice;" who, to advance his cauſe and religion in the world, will break through all the obligations of nature and civil ſociety

ty, undermine government, and disturb the peace of mankind. SERM. CXXXI.

Whereas our SAVIOUR did not by any thing in his religion design to alter the civil government of the world, or to lessen and diminish the rights of princes, or to set men loose from allegiance to them, or to make treason and rebellion, bloody wars and barbarous massacres lawful, for the propagating of his faith. He had (as one would imagine) as much power as the pope; but yet he deposed no princes, nor excommunicated and discharged their subjects from their fidelity and obedience to them, for their opposition to his religion; he hath assumed no such power to himself. "By what authority "then doth his vicar do these things? and who "gave him this authority?" Our LORD tells us plainly, "his kingdom was not of this world;" and that without any distinction of *in ordine ad spiritualia*, and therefore he wrested no prince's kingdom out of his hands, nor seized it as forfeited to himself.

But this power the pope claims to himself, and hath exercised it many a time, disturbing the peace of nations, and exercising the most barbarous cruelties in the world, under a pretence of zeal for GOD and religion: as if because religion is so very good a thing in itself, it would warrant men to do the very worst things for its sake; which is the ready way to render religion contemptible and odious, and to make two of the best things in the world, GOD and religion, good for nothing.

If we would preserve in the minds of men any reverence and esteem for religion, we must take heed how we destroy the principles of natural religion, and undermine the peace and happiness of human society,

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ſociety, for the glory of GOD, and under pretence of following divine revelation, and being led by a church that cannot err; for every church doth certainly err, that teacheth any thing plainly contrary to the principles and dictates of natural religion, and utterly inconſiſtent with the eſſential perfections of GOD, and with the peace and order of the world: for "GOD is not the GOD of confuſion, but of or-"der;" which St. Paul appealeth to, as a principle of eternal truth, and naturally known: but they that pretend that religion prompts men to ſedition and cruelty, do repreſent GOD as the GOD of confuſion, and not of order.

Therefore whatever men may through an ignorant zeal, or for ambitious ends, pretend to be religion; let us place it in that which is unqueſtionable, the imitation of the divine perfections, and let us (as the apoſtle exhorts) "put on, as the elect of "GOD, bowels of mercy, kindneſs, meekneſs, "long-ſuffering, and above all, let us put on cha-"rity, which is the very bond of perfection." The great perfection of the divine nature, or rather the very eſſence of GOD, is love. So St. John ſpeaks, "GOD is love, and he that dwelleth in love, "dwelleth in GOD, and GOD in him." And it is very remarkable that in theſe very qualities of charity, and kindneſs, and compaſſion, which we peculiarly call humanity, we approach neareſt to the divinity itſelf, and that the contrary diſpoſitions do transform us into wild beaſts and devils.

And yet as ſeverely as I ſpeak againſt theſe principles and practices, I have an hearty pity and compaſſion for thoſe who are under the power of ſo great a deluſion, and upon a pretence of being made the only true Chriſtians in the world, are ſeduced from

from humanity itſelf, and ſo far from being made good Chriſtians by theſe principles, that they are hardly left to be men; "being blinded, and led by "the blind, they fall into the ditch" of the groſſeſt and fouleſt immoralities; ſuch as are plainly enough condemned by the light of nature, if there were no bible in the world. SERM. CXXXI.

Not but that we proteſtants have our faults and our follies too, and thoſe (GOD knows) too many and too viſible; we poſſeſs more truth, but there is little peace among us; and yet GOD is as well and as often in ſcripture called "the GOD of peace," as "the "GOD of truth." In this great light and liberty of the reformed religion, we are apt to be wanton, and to quarrel and fall out; we are full of heats and animoſities, of ſchiſms and diviſions, "and the "way of peace we have not known." GOD grant that at laſt "in this our day" (when it concerns us ſo much) we may "know the things that belong "to our peace, before they be hid from our eyes."

You ſee in what things the practice of religion mainly conſiſts, in our likeneſs to GOD, and reſemblance of him in holineſs and goodneſs; and without this we are utterly incapable of happineſs: we cannot ſee GOD, unleſs we be like him. The preſence of GOD can adminiſter no pleaſure, no felicity to us, till we be changed into his image; till we come to this temper, to hate ſin, and delight in purity and holineſs, we can have no delightful communion with the holy GOD; till our paſſions be ſubdued, and our ſouls diſpoſſeſt of thoſe deviliſh and ungodlike qualities of hatred and malice, of revenge and impatience, and till we be endued with the ſpirit of univerſal goodneſs and charity, we are not fit company for our heavenly Father; we are not qualified

to

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to dwell with God, who is love, and dwells in love. So far as we are defective in theſe divine qualities and perfections, ſo far we fall ſhort of the temper of happineſs.

There is a direct and eternal oppoſition between the holy and good God, and the evil diſpoſitions of wicked men, and till this oppoſition be removed, it is impoſſible we ſhould find any felicity in the enjoyment of God. Now the nature of God is fixt and unchangeable; God cannot recede from his own perfection, and therefore we muſt quit our ſins: thou canſt not change God, therefore change thy ſelf, and rather think of putting off thy corrupt nature, which may be changed, than of altering the divine nature, "with whom is no variableneſs nor "ſhadow of turning." God condeſcended to take our nature upon him, to make us capable of happineſs; but if this will not do, he will not put off his own nature to make us happy.

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The happineſs of God.

1 TIM. i. 11. *The bleſſed* God—

The whole verſe runs thus,

According to the glorious goſpel of the bleſſed God, *which was committed to my truſt.*

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SINCE all men naturally deſire happineſs, and thirſt after it; methinks we ſhould all deſire to know what it is, and where it is to be found, and how

how it is to be attained by us, in that degree in which creatures are capable of it. What Job ſays of wiſdom, may be ſaid alſo of happineſs; "God underſtandeth the way thereof, and he knoweth the "place thereof." He only, who is perfectly poſſeſt of it himſelf, knows wherein it conſiſts, and what are the true ingredients of it. SERM. CXXXII.

So that to direct us in our ſearch after happineſs, the beſt way will be to contemplate and conſider the divine nature, which is the perfect pattern and idea of happineſs, the original ſpring and fountain of all the felicity that creatures are capable of. And to that end, I have pitched upon theſe words, wherein the apoſtle attributes this perfection of bleſſedneſs or happineſs to God, "The bleſſed God."

And though this be as eſſential a part as any other of that notion which mankind have of God from the light of nature, yet I no where find in all the new teſtament, this attribute of happineſs given to God, but only twice in this epiſtle. 'Tis true indeed, the title of bleſſedneſs is frequently given both to God and Christ, but in another ſenſe, and in a quite different notion: as Mark xiv. 61. where the high-prieſt aſks our Saviour, "Art thou the Christ, "the Son of the bleſſed, τῦ εὐλογητῦ, of him that "is celebrated and praiſed;" and 2 Cor. xi. 31. "The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, "who is bleſſed for evermore." So likewiſe, Rom. i. 25. "The Creator bleſſed for evermore:" Which likewiſe is ſaid of Christ, Rom. ix. 5. "Of whom Christ came, who is over all, God "bleſſed for evermore; that is, for ever to be "praiſed and celebrated." But in all theſe texts the Greek word is εὐλογητὸς, which though we tranſlate bleſſed, yet it is a quite different notion from the

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the title of bleſſedneſs which is given to GOD in the text, where the word is not εὐλογητὸς, but μακάριος, "the bleſſed, or happy GOD;" and this title is not any where in all the new teſtament (that I know of) given to GOD, but here in the text, and Chap. vi. v. 15. where our LORD JESUS CHRIST (who alſo is GOD) is called "the bleſſed and the only potentate." And whether this title of "the "bleſſed or the happy GOD," be here in the text given to GOD the Father, or to his eternal Son, our LORD JESUS CHRIST; is not ſo much material to my preſent purpoſe to inquire. For, ſuppoſe it be CHRIST who is here called "the bleſſed GOD;" this however is certain, that bleſſedneſs or happineſs is a title belonging to GOD, which is all that is neceſſary for a foundation of my preſent diſcourſe.

In ſpeaking of this argument, I ſhall do theſe three things.

I. Shew what we are to underſtand by the happineſs of GOD, and what are the eſſential ingredients of it.

II. That this title doth belong to GOD, and that the divine nature is perfectly bleſſed and happy.

III. How far creatures are capable of happineſs, and by what ways and means they may be made partakers of it: and ſhall then make ſome inferences from my diſcourſe upon this argument.

I. I will conſider what we are to underſtand by the bleſſedneſs or happineſs of GOD, and what are the eſſential ingredients of it. Now the notion of happineſs taken at its higheſt pitch (as we muſt neceſſarily do when we apply it to GOD) is no other than a fixt and immoveable ſtate of contentment and ſatisfaction, of pleaſure and delight, reſulting from the ſecure poſſeſſion, and enjoyment of all that is good

and

and deſirable, that is, of all excellency and perfecti- SERM. on; ſo that theſe following ingredients muſt go to CXXXII. make up a perfect ſtate of happineſs.

1. Perfect knowledge, to underſtand what it is that conſtitutes happineſs, and to know when one is really poſſeſt of it. For as he is not happy, who is ſo only in imagination or a dream, without any real foundation in the thing; for he may be pleaſed with his condition, and yet be far enough from being truly happy: So on the other hand, he that has all other neceſſary ingredients of happineſs, and only wants this, that he doth not think himſelf ſo, cannot be happy. For this we often ſee in the imperfect felicity of this world, that many men who have all the materials and circumſtances of a worldly happineſs about them, yet by the unſkilful management of the matter, and from a lightneſs and injudiciouſneſs of mind, not knowing when they are well, they make an hard ſhift, even when they are in as good circumſtances as it is almoſt poſſible for men to be in this world, to be very diſcontented and miſerable in their own opinions. But God perfectly knows both what makes happineſs, and that he is poſſeſt of it.

2. To perfect happineſs is likewiſe required a full power to do whatever conduceth to happineſs, and likewiſe to check and controul whatever would be an hindrance and diſturbance to it; and therefore no being is as happy as it can be, that is not all-ſufficient, and hath not within its power and reach whatever is neceſſary to an happy condition, and neceſſary to ſecure and continue that happineſs againſt all attempts and accidents whatſoever.

3. There is wiſdom alſo required to direct this power, and manage it in ſuch a manner, as it may effectually conduce to this end; and this is very different

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ferent from mere power, abſtractedly conſidered; for one may have all the materials of happineſs, and yet want the wiſdom and ſkill to put them ſo together, as to frame an happy condition out of them; and he is not happy, who doth not thoroughly underſtand the proper method and means of compaſſing and ſecuring his own happineſs.

4. Another moſt conſiderable and eſſential ingredient of happineſs is goodneſs; without which, as there can be no true majeſty and greatneſs, ſo neither can there be any felicity or happineſs. Now goodneſs is a generous diſpoſition of mind to communicate and diffuſe itſelf, by making others partakers of its happineſs in ſuch degrees as they are capable of it, and as wiſdom ſhall direct: For he is not ſo happy as he may be, who hath not the pleaſure of making others ſo, and of ſeeing them put into an happy condition by his means, which is the higheſt pleaſure (I had almoſt ſaid pride, but I may truly ſay glory) of a good and great mind: For by ſuch communications of himſelf, an immenſe and all-ſufficient being doth not leſſen himſelf, or put any thing out of his power, but doth rather enlarge and magnify himſelf; and does, as I may ſay, give great eaſe and delight to a full and fruitful being, without the leaſt diminution of his power and happineſs. For the cauſe and original of all other beings can make nothing ſo independent upon itſelf, as not ſtill to maintain his intereſt in it, to have it always under his power and government; and no being can rebel againſt his maker, without extreme hazard to himſelf.

5. Perfect happineſs doth imply the exerciſe of all other virtues, which are ſuitable to ſo perfect a being, upon all proper and fitting occaſions; that is, that ſo perfect a being do nothing that is contrary

trary to, or unbecoming his holineſs and righteouſneſs, his truth and faithfulneſs, which are eſſential to a perfect being; and for ſuch a being to act contrary to them in any caſe, would be to create diſquiet and diſturbance to itſelf: For this is a certain rule, and never fails, that nothing can act contrary to its own nature without reluctancy and diſpleaſure, which in moral agents is that which we call guilt: for guilt is nothing elſe but the trouble and diſquiet which ariſeth in one's mind, from the conſciouſneſs of having done ſomething which is contrary to the perfective principles of his being, that is, ſomething that doth not become him, and which, being what he is, he ought not to have done; which we cannot imagine ever to befal ſo perfect and immutable a being as God is. SERM. CXXXII.

6. Perfect happineſs implies in it the ſettled and ſecure poſſeſſion of all thoſe excellencies and perfections; for if any of theſe were liable to fail, or be diminiſhed, ſo much would be taken off from perfect and complete happineſs. If the Deity were ſubject to any change or impairment of his condition, ſo that either his knowledge, or power, or wiſdom, or goodneſs, or any other perfection, could any ways decline or fall off, there would be a proportionable abatement of happineſs. And from all thoſe do reſult, in the

7th and laſt place, Infinite contentment and ſatisfaction, pleaſure and delight, which is the very eſſence of happineſs.

1. Infinite contentment and ſatisfaction in this condition. And well may happineſs be contented with itſelf; that is, with ſuch a condition, that he that is poſſeſt of it, can neither deſire it ſhould be better, nor have any cauſe to fear it ſhould be worſe.

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2. Pleaſure and delight, which is ſomething more than contentment: for one may be contented with an affliction, and painful condition, in which he is far from taking any pleaſure and delight. "No "affliction is joyous for the preſent, but grievous," as the apoſtle ſpeaks, Heb. xii. But there cannot be perfect happineſs without pleaſure in our condition. Full pleaſure is a certain mixture of love and joy, hard to be expreſt in words, but certainly known by inward ſenſe and experience.

And thus I have endeavoured to deſcribe to you, as well as I could, according to our imperfect conceptions and expreſſions of God, the happineſs of the divine nature, and wherein it conſiſts. I proceed to the

II. Thing I propoſed, which was to ſhew, that this attribute of perfection doth belong to God; and that the divine nature is perfectly bleſſed and happy; and this is ſo univerſal an acknowledgment of natural light, that it would be a very ſuperfluous and impertinent work, to trouble you with particular citations of heathen authors to this purpoſe; nothing being more frequent in them than to call the Deity, *beatiſſimam & perfectiſſimam naturam*, "the moſt "happy and moſt perfect being," and therefore happy, becauſe felicity doth naturally reſult from perfection. It ſhall ſuffice to take notice of theſe two things out of heathen writers, to my preſent purpoſe.

1. That they accounted happineſs ſo eſſential to the notion of a God, that this was one of the ways which they took to find out what properties were fit to attribute to God, and what not; to conſider, what things are conſiſtent with happineſs, or inconſiſtent with it; and whatever did ſignify happineſs, and was a perfection conſiſtent with it, they aſcribed to

GOD, as a ſuitable property of the divine nature; and whatever was otherwiſe, they removed it from GOD, as unfit to be ſaid of him. SERM. CXXXII.

2. Whatever differences there were among the philoſophers concerning the perfection of the divine nature, they all agreed in the perfect felicity of it; even Epicurus himſelf, who ſo boldly attempted to ſtrip the divine nature of moſt of its perfections, by denying that GOD either made or governed the world; whereby he took away at once his being the firſt cauſe and original of all things, and his goodneſs likewiſe, and wiſdom, and power, and juſtice; or at leaſt made all theſe uſeleſs, by taking away all occaſion and opportunity for the exerciſe of them; yet this man does frequently own, and profeſs to believe the happineſs of the divine nature; and then out of an ignorant and officious kindneſs to the Deity, and (as he pretended) for the ſecurity of his felicity, did, in effect, take away his other perfections; he would by no means put GOD to the trouble and burden of making the world, or taking care of the affairs of it, leſt this ſhould diſcompoſe the Deity, or be an interruption or diſturbance of his eaſe and felicity. For thus Lucretius, the great diſciple of Epicurus, deſcribes his opinion of the divine nature:

Omnis enim divûm, per ſe, natura neceſſe eſt,
Immortali ævo ſummâ cum pace fruatur,
Semota à noſtris rebus, ſejunctaque longè.
Nam privata dolore omni, privata periclis,
Ipſa ſuis pollens opibus, nihil indiga noſtri,
Nec benè promeritis capitur, nec tangitur irâ.

That is, "It is neceſſary that the divine nature "ſhould be happy, and therefore altogether un-"concerned in our affairs; free from all grief and

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"danger, ſufficient for itſelf, and ſtanding in need "of no body, neither pleaſed with our good actions, "nor provoked by our faults." This was a very falſe notion both of God and happineſs, to imagine that the care of the world ſhould be a pain and diſturbance to infinite knowledge, and power, and goodneſs. But this is not now my buſineſs to conſider; that which is to my preſent purpoſe, is, that the happineſs of the divine nature was univerſally owned; and that bleſſedneſs is ſo inſeparable from the notion of a Deity, that whoever profeſſes to believe a God, muſt acknowledge him to be perfectly happy.

As for the teſtimony of ſcripture, I have already told you, that there are but two texts wherein this title of μακάριος, the happy or bleſſed, is given to God; but by conſequence the ſcripture every where declares the happineſs of the divine nature, viz. wherever it ſpeaks of the excellency and perfection of his being, of his knowledge, and power, and wiſdom, and goodneſs, and righteouſneſs, and of the eternity and unchangeableneſs of theſe, and of the infinite delight and complacency which he takes in the enjoyment of theſe perfections. I ſhall now proceed to the

III. And laſt thing which I propoſed to conſider, viz. How far creatures are capable of happineſs, and by what ways and means they may be made partakers of it. They are not capable of abſolute and perfect happineſs, becauſe that reſults from infinite perfection, which is no where to be found but in God: it remains then, that creatures are only capable of being happy in a finite and limited degree, by the reſemblance of God, and by the enjoyment of him; by being like to him, and by our likeneſs to

to him, being qualified for his favour, and for the enjoyment of him. SERM. CXXXII.

As we are creatures of a finite power, and limited underſtandings, and a mutable nature, we do neceſſarily want many of thoſe perfections, which are the cauſe and ingredients of a perfect happineſs. We are far from being ſufficient for our own happineſs; we are neither ſo of ourſelves, nor can we make ourſelves ſo by our own power; for neither are we wiſe enough for our own direction, nor good enough for our own ſatisfaction. All the happineſs that we are capable of is, by communication from him, who is the original and fountain of it; by our being made "partakers of the divine nature," (as St. Peter ſpeaks) by our reſemblance of GOD in thoſe perfections which are the moſt eſſential ingredients of happineſs, his goodneſs, and righteouſneſs, and truth, and holineſs; theſe do immediately qualify us for the favour and friendſhip of Almighty GOD, and for the bleſſed ſight and enjoyment of him; and the favour of GOD, and the light of his countenance lifted up upon us, and his friendſhip and good-will to us, ſupplies all the defects of power and wiſdom in us: for GOD being our friend, we have an intereſt in all his perfections, and a ſecurity, that, as occaſion requires, they will all be employed for our benefit and advantage; ſo that though we are "weak in ourſelves," we are "ſtrong in the "LORD, and in the power of his might," and are "able to do all things through him ſtrengthning "us;" and though "we want wiſdom," we may have free recourſe to the fountain of it, and "aſk "of GOD, who gives to all liberally, and upbraid-"eth not." And it is next to have theſe perfections in ourſelves, to know where to have them for

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aſking, whenever we ſtand in need of them, ſo far as is neceſſary to our happineſs.

So that though our happineſs depend upon another, yet if we be careful to qualify ourſelves for it, (and God is always ready to aſſiſt us by his grace to this purpoſe) it is really and in effect in our own power; and we are every whit as ſafe and happy in God's care and protection of us, as if we were ſufficient for ourſelves. However, this is the higheſt happineſs that the condition of a creature is capable of, to have all our defects ſupplied in ſo liberal a manner by the bounty of another, and to have a free recourſe to the fountain of happineſs, and at laſt to be admitted to the bleſſed ſight and enjoyment of him, "in whoſe preſence is fulneſs of joy, and at "whoſe right hand are pleaſures for evermore." I have done with the three things I propoſed to ſpeak to.

But to what purpoſe, may ſome ſay, is this long deſcription and diſcourſe of happineſs? How are we the wiſer and the better for it? I anſwer, very much, in ſeveral reſpects.

1. This plainly ſhews us, that atheiſm is a very melancholy and miſchievous thing; it would take away the fountain of happineſs, and the only perfect pattern of it; it endeavours at once to extinguiſh the being of God, and all the life and comfort of mankind, ſo that we would neither form any idea of happineſs, or be in any poſſibility of attaining it. For it is plain, we are not ſufficient for it of ourſelves; and if there be not a God, there is nothing that can make us ſo. God is "the true light of the "world," and a thouſand times more neceſſary to the comfort and happineſs of mankind, than the ſun itſelf, which is but a dark ſhadow of that infinitely more

more bright and glorious being; "the happy and "only potentate" (as the apoſtle deſcribes him in the latter end of this epiſtle) "who only hath im- "mortality, dwelling in that light which no man "can approach unto, whom no man hath ſeen, nor "can ſee," meaning in this mortal ſtate. SERM. CXXXII.

So that the greateſt enemies, and moſt injurious of all others to mankind, are thoſe who would baniſh the belief of a God out of the world; becauſe this is "to lay the ax to the root of the tree," and at one blow to cut off all hopes of happineſs from mankind. So that he is a fool indeed, that "ſays in his heart there is no God;" that is, that wiſheth there were none; becauſe it is poſſible for a man to wiſh worſe to himſelf, and more effectually to deſtroy his own happineſs.

2. If the divine nature be ſo infinitely and compleatly happy, this is a very great confirmation of our faith and hope concerning the happineſs of another life, which the ſcripture deſcribes to us, by the ſight and enjoyment of God. As we are creatures, we are not capable of the happineſs that is abſolutely and infinitely perfect, becauſe our nature is but finite, and limited; but the bleſſed God, who is infinitely happy himſelf, can alſo make us happy according to our finite meaſure and capacity. For, as he that is the firſt and original being, can communicate being to other things; ſo he that is the fountain of happineſs, can derive and convey happineſs to his creatures.

And we ſhall the more eaſily believe this, when we conſider that goodneſs, as it is the prime perfection, ſo it is likewiſe the chief felicity of the divine nature. It is his glory and delight to communicate himſelf, and ſhed abroad his goodneſs; and the high-

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eſt expreſſion of the divine goodneſs, is to communicate happineſs to his creatures, and to be willing that they ſhould ſhare and partake with him in it. Baſe and envious natures are narrow and contracted, and love to confine their enjoyments and good things to themſelves, and are loth that others ſhould take part with them; but the moſt noble and moſt generous minds are moſt free and enlarged, and cannot be happy themſelves, unleſs they find or make others ſo.

This is the higheſt pitch of goodneſs, and conſequently the higheſt contentment, and the ſupreme delight of the divine nature. Now it is natural to every body, to be moſt frequent and abundant in thoſe acts in which it finds the greateſt pleaſures; to be good, and to do good, is the ſupreme felicity of GOD himſelf; therefore we may eaſily believe, that he is very ready and forward to make us happy, by all the ways that are agreeable to his wiſdom and righteouſneſs; and that he is alſo willing to make us abundantly ſo, and to advance us to the higheſt degree of felicity, of which our nature is capable, if we do not render ourſelves incapable of ſuch a bleſſing, by an obſtinate refuſal of it, and utter indiſpoſition for it.

This, I ſay, is very credible, becauſe the happineſs of GOD himſelf conſiſts in that propenſion and diſpoſition of nature, which tends to make others happy. And if there can be any acceſſion to that which is infinite, GOD himſelf finds a new pleaſure and felicity in the communication of his goodneſs to his creatures; and therefore is repreſented in ſcripture, as glad of "the converſion of a ſinner," becauſe the ſinner hereby becomes capable of the happineſs which GOD deſigned for his creatures, and is always ready to confer upon them, whenever they

they are qualified for it, and he can, with the honour of his own perfections, beſtow it upon them. SERM. CXXXII.

There are two things which raiſe our hopes and expectation of good from any perſon; if he be able and willing to beſtow upon us what we hope for from him. Now if any one can confer happineſs upon us, it is he who is infinitely poſſeſt of it, and hath all the treaſures of it in himſelf, and that GOD only is, who, as he is able, ſo is willing to make us happy, if we be qualified for it; and it is no impairing of his happineſs to make others happy; for even that goodneſs, which inclines him to communicate happineſs to others, is a great part of his own felicity; ſo that, as our SAVIOUR argues, "becauſe "I live, you ſhall live alſo," we may reaſon in like manner, that "becauſe GOD is happy, we ſhall be "happy alſo," if we do but ſincerely deſire and endeavour to qualify ourſelves for it. The goodneſs of GOD does ſtrongly incline him to deſire our happineſs, and makes him willing and ready to beſtow it upon us, whenever we are capable to receive it.

So that the goodneſs of GOD is the great foundation of all our hopes, and the firmeſt ground of our aſſurance of a bleſſed immortality. It is the happineſs of the divine nature to communicate himſelf; and the communications of GOD's goodneſs to us are the cauſe of our happineſs; and therefore, both for our example and encouragement, the goodneſs of GOD ought always to be repreſented to the greateſt advantage, and we ſhould endeavour to poſſeſs our minds with a firm belief and perſuaſion of it, and to remove from the divine nature (which we all acknowledge to have infinitely more goodneſs than is to be found in any of the ſons of men) whatever we would not attribute to a good man, and to vindicate

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dicate GOD from all ſuſpicion of envy and ill-will, of cruelty and arbitrary dealing with his creatures. And I cannot apprehend why men ſhould be averſe from theſe ſo agreeable and delightful apprehenſions of GOD; or how it ſhould be any man's intereſt to leſſen the goodneſs of GOD; for moſt certainly the better GOD is in himſelf, the better and happier it will be for us all, if it be not our own fault.

3. From what hath been ſaid concerning the happineſs of the divine nature, we may learn wherein our happineſs muſt conſiſt, namely, in the image, and in the favour of GOD; in the favour of GOD as the cauſe of our happineſs; and in the image of GOD, as a neceſſary inward diſpoſition and qualification for it. Unleſs GOD loves us, we cannot be happy, for miſerable are they whom he hates; for GOD to ſay of any man, that "his ſoul hath no pleaſure "in him," imports as great miſery, and as dreadful a curſe as can be imagined, and his ſoul can have no pleaſure in a bad man; for "he loveth "righteouſneſs and hateth iniquity, he is not a GOD "that hath pleaſure in wickedneſs, neither ſhall "evil dwell with him; the wicked ſhall not ſtand "in his ſight; he hateth all the workers of iniqui-"ty." Nay, if we could ſuppoſe that he could love and take pleaſure in any perſon that is unlike to him (which is impoſſible) yet that perſon could not be happy, becauſe he would want that inward frame and diſpoſition of mind, which is neceſſary to happineſs. For the very ſame cauſes and ingredients which make up the happineſs of GOD, muſt in an inferior degree be found in us, otherwiſe we cannot be happy; no, tho' a man were in heaven, if he be ſtill a bad man, *cælum non animum mutavit*, he hath only changed the climate, and is gone into another

another country, but he bears himſelf ſtill about him, SERM.
and his mind is not changed, which would ſignify CXXXII.
a thouſand times more to his happineſs, than any place or outward circumſtances whatſoever. A bad man, whereſoever he goes, hath a root of gall and bitterneſs within him, and is miſerable from himſelf; he hath a fiend in his own breaſt, and the fuel of hell in a guilty conſcience.

For there is a certain temper and diſpoſition of mind, that is neceſſary and eſſential to happineſs, and that is holineſs and goodneſs, which is the nature of God; and ſo much as any perſon departs from this temper, ſo far he removes himſelf, and runs away from happineſs: and as ſin is a departure from God, ſo the puniſhment of it is likewiſe expreſt by departing from him; "depart from me ye "curſed; depart from me all ye that work iniqui-"ty, I know you not."

And this is one great part of the miſery of thoſe degenerate and accurſed ſpirits, the devils, who are for ever baniſhed from the preſence of God, that they are of a temper quite contrary to God, wicked and impure, envious and malicious, miſchievous and cruel; and ſuch a temper is naturally a torment and diſquiet to itſelf. And here the foundation of hell is laid in the evil diſpoſition of our minds; and till this be cured, and ſet right, it is as impoſſible for any of us to be happy, as it is for a limb that is out of joint to be at eaſe. And the external preſence of God, and a local heaven (if we could imagine ſuch a perſon to be admitted into it, and ſee all the glories of that place, and the pleaſures and delights of that ſtate) all this, I ſay, would ſignify no more to make a bad man happy, than heaps of gold and diamonds, and conſorts of the moſt delicious muſick,

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ſick, and a well-ſpread table, and a rich and coſtly bed would contribute to a man's eaſe in the paroxyſm of a fever, or in a violent fit of the ſtone; becauſe the man hath that within which torments him, and until that be removed, he cannot poſſibly be at eaſe. The man's ſpirits are out of order, and off the hinges, and toſt from its center, and till they be ſet right, and reſtored to their proper place and ſtate by goodneſs and holineſs, the man will be perpetually reſtleſs, and cannot poſſibly have any eaſe or peace in his mind: for how can there be peace, how can there be happineſs to him, who is of a temper directly oppoſite to it? "The wicked," ſaith the prophet, Iſa. lvii. 20, 21. "is like the troubled ſea when it "cannot reſt, whoſe waters caſt up mire and dirt." So long as there is impurity in our hearts, and guilt upon our conſciences, they will be reſtleſsly working; "there is no peace, ſaith my God, to the "wicked." The Hebrew word which we tranſlate peace, ſignifies all kind of happineſs; there can be no felicity to a bad man. The conſideration whereof ſhould put us upon the moſt ſerious and earneſt endeavours to be like God, that we may be capable of his favour, and partakers of his felicity. The divine nature is the only perfect idea of happineſs, and nothing but our conformity to it can make us happy.

I have been ſo long upon this argument, on purpoſe to convince men of the neceſſity of holineſs and goodneſs, and all other virtues, to our preſent and future happineſs. They underſtand not the nature of happineſs, who hope for it, or imagine they can attain it in any other way. The author and the fountain of happineſs, he that made us, and alone can make us happy, cannot make us ſo in any other way, than by planting in us ſuch a diſpoſition of

 mind,

mind, as is in truth a participation of the divine nature, and by endowing us with ſuch qualities as are the neceſſary materials and ingredients of happineſs. There is no way to partake of the felicity of God bleſſed for ever, but by becoming holy and righteous, good and merciful as he is. SERM. CXXXII.

All men naturally deſire happineſs, and ſeek after it, and are as they think travelling towards it, but generally they miſtake their way. Many are eager in the purſuit of the things of this world, and greedily catch at pleaſures and riches and honour, as if theſe could make them happy; but when they come to embrace them, they find that they are but clouds and ſhadows, and that there is no real and ſubſtantial felicity in them. "Many ſay, who will ſhew us any "good?" Meaning the good things of this world, corn, and wine, and oil: but wouldſt thou be happy indeed? endeavour to be like the pattern of happineſs, and the fountain of it; addreſs thyſelf to him in the prayer of the pſalmiſt, "Lord, lift thou up "upon me the light of thy countenance, and thou "ſhalt put more joy and gladneſs into my heart," than the men of the world can have, when their corn and their wine increaſeth.

Many ſay, Lo here, and lo there! That happineſs is in a great place, or in a plentiful eſtate, or in the enjoyment of ſenſual pleaſures and delight; but believe them not: happineſs is ſomething that is nearer and more intimate to us, than any of the things of this world; it is within thee, in thine heart, and in the very inward frame and diſpoſition of thy mind.

In a word, if ever we would be happy, we muſt be like the bleſſed God, we muſt be holy, and merciful, and good, and juſt, as he is, and then we are ſecure of his favour; for "the righteous Lord lov-

"eth

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" eth righteouſneſs, and his countenance will be-
" hold the upright." Then we ſhall be qualified for the enjoyment of him, and take pleaſure in communion with him, becauſe we ſhall be like him. For the ſureſt foundation of love and friendſhip is a ſimilitude of temper and diſpoſition; every thing naturally affects its own likeneſs, and moves towards it, and greedily catcheth at it; and gladly runs into the embraces of it. GOD and man muſt be like one another, before they can take pleaſure in one another: if we be unlike to GOD, it is in the nature of the thing impoſſible that we ſhould be happy in one another, and therefore there muſt be a change either in GOD or us, to bring about this likeneſs. The nature of GOD is inflexible, fixt, and unchangeable; therefore change thyſelf, ſinner, and endeavour to be like GOD; for ſince he cannot depart from his holineſs, and purity, thou muſt leave thy ſins, and be holy as he is holy, if ever thou hopeſt to be happy, as he is: " every man that hath this hope in him," muſt " purify himſelf, even as he is pure."

" Now to this happy and only Potentate, King of
" kings, and LORD of lords, who only hath im-
" mortality, and dwelleth in that light which no
" man can approach unto, whom no man hath
" ſeen, or can ſee; to him be honour, and pow-
" er everlaſting. Amen."

SERMON

SERMON CXXXIII.

The unchangeableneſs of GOD.

JAMES i. 17.

With whom is no variableneſs, nor ſhadow of turning.

The whole period runs thus.

Do not err, my beloved brethren: Every good gift, and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableneſs, nor ſhadow of turning.

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THE connexion and dependance of theſe words upon the former is briefly this; the apoſtle had aſſerted before, that GOD is not the author of ſin and evil, ver. 13, 14. "Let no man ſay when "he is tempted, I am tempted of GOD, for GOD "cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he "any man: but every man is tempted, when he is "drawn aſide of his own luſt, and enticed;" and here in the text he aſſerts, that GOD is the fountain and author of all good; "do not err, my beloved "brethren;" as if he had ſaid, no not miſtake me, though ſin and evil be not from GOD, but from our ſelves, and our own corrupt hearts; yet all good is from GOD, and not from ourſelves: though we be the authors of the ſins we commit, yet we are not ſo of the good that we do, this is from GOD; "eve-"ry good gift, and every perfect gift is from above, "and cometh down from the Father of lights." Sin, which is nothing but evil and imperfection, is not from GOD, but wholly from ourſelves; whatever is good and perfect, is not from ourſelves, but from

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from GOD; we are neither inclined to that which is good, nor are able of ourſelves to perform it; both the inclination and the power are from GOD, who is the fountain of goodneſs and perfection, and can never be otherwiſe, and can never change nor ceaſe to be ſo, "for with him is no variableneſs, nor ſhadow "of turning."

"Every good gift, and every perfect gift;" all that goodneſs, and all thoſe degrees of perfection, which are in the creatures, in the higheſt angels or ſaints, in the beſt of the ſons of men, whatever there is of excellency and perfection, of goodneſs or happineſs in any of them, "is from above," that is, from heaven, it is "the gift of GOD," and "com-"eth down" from that perfect, good, and glorious being, whom the apoſtle here calls "the Father of "lights," in alluſion to the ſun, which is a kind of univerſal benefactor to the world, and liberally diſpenſeth his light and heat and influence upon all things here below: but then there is this difference, the ſun changeth its habitudes and poſitions in reference to us, and varies it's ſhadows; it riſeth and ſets, comes nearer to us, and goes farther from us; but it is otherwiſe with this intellectual and immaterial ſun, "the Father of lights, with whom there is no varia-"bleneſs, nor ſhadow of turning," παραλλαγὴ ἢ τροπῆς ἀποσκίασμα, which are all aſtronomical words; the firſt, παραλλαγὴ, ſignifies the various habitudes and poſitions wherein the ſun appears to us every day, at it's riſing, in the meridian, and when it ſets; τροπὴ is a word which belongs not to the daily, but to the yearly courſe of the ſun, which is nearer to us, or farther from us, as he approacheth nearer towards the northern or ſouthern tropicks; and hence it is that it caſts ſeveral ſhadows to people in ſeveral countries;

tries; and agreeably to this, the word ἀποσκίασμα, "caſting of ſhadows," being joined with τροπὴ, ſignifies the variation of the ſhadows according to the courſe and motion of the ſun. SERM. CXXXIII.

But GOD is an eternal ſpring of light, which never riſes or ſets, which hath no mixture of ſhadow nor darkneſs, hath no changes nor variations, but is always the ſame free and liberal diſpenſer of good things to his creatures; "the Father of lights, with "whom there is no variableneſs nor ſhadow of turn-"ing;" which words ſignify "the immutable per-"fection and goodneſs of the divine nature," which ſhall (by GOD's aſſiſtance) be the ſubject of my preſent diſcourſe; in which I ſhall proceed in this method:

First, I ſhall briefly explain what is meant by the immutability, or unchangeableneſs, of the divine nature.

Secondly, I ſhall ſhew that this is a perfection eſſential to GOD, to be immutably what he is, that is, good and perfect.

Thirdly, I ſhall anſwer an objection which lies againſt it, from the mention ſo often made in ſcripture of GOD's repenting himſelf. And,

Fourthly, apply the conſideration of it to our ſelves.

I. For the explication of it. By the immutability of GOD, we mean, that he always is, and was, and to all eternity will be the ſame; that he undergoes no changes either of his eſſence and being, or of his properties and perfections. In reference to the unchangeableneſs of his being, he is ſaid to be "eter-"nal, incorruptible, and only to have immortali-"ty." In reference to his perfections, he is always the ſame infinitely wiſe, and good, and powerful, and holy, and juſt being; from whence it follows,

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that he is conſtant and immutable in all his decrees and counſels, his purpoſes and promiſes. We are uncertain and mutable in our very nature and beings, and in all thoſe qualities and perfections which belong to us, in all our purpoſes, reſolutions, and actions; we are continually growing or decreaſing in this or that quality, and do frequently change from one extreme to another, from that which is more perfect, to the contrary; now knowing, and then ignorant; ſometimes wiſe, and oftner fooliſh, ſtronger and weaker, better or worſe, as it happens, and as we order ourſelves, continually waxing or waining in our knowledge, and wiſdom, and goodneſs, and power; we frequently change our minds, and alter our purpoſes, and break our promiſes, and contradict our firmeſt and moſt ſerious reſolutions, and ſpeak a thing and do it not, ſay it and do not bring it to paſs; but GOD is everlaſtingly the ſame in all his perfections, conſtant to his intentions, ſteady to his purpoſes, immutably fixed and perſevering in all his decrees and reſolutions. I proceed to the

II. Thing I propoſed, namely, to ſhew that this perfection is eſſential to GOD, to be unchangeably what he is. And this I ſhall endeavour to make manifeſt both from natural reaſon, and from the divine revelation of the holy ſcriptures.

1. From the dictates of natural reaſon, which tell us, that nothing argues greater weakneſs and imperfection than inconſtancy and change. This is the great vanity of all creatures, that they are uncertain, and do not long continue in one ſtate: this is the vanity of the world in general, that "the faſhion of "it paſſeth away;" and of man in particular, that he is liable to ſo many natural changes, by age, and diſeaſes, and death; for which reaſon, he is ſaid by

the Pſalmiſt, to be, "in his beſt eſtate, altogether "vanity:" and that he is liable to ſo many moral changes, to be deluded and deceived in his underſtanding, and to alter his opinion ſo often, to be ſo fickle in his will, and to change ſo often his purpoſes and reſolutions, according to the alteration or appearance of things. We attribute change and inconſtancy to perſons of the weakeſt age and underſtanding; as children, who are liable "to be toſt to "and fro, and carried about with every wind," as the apoſtle ſpeaks, Eph. iv. 14. SERM. CXXXIII.

Now if the divine nature were ſubject to change, this would caſt an univerſal cloud upon all the divine perfections, and obſcure all other excellencies, and make them "like the flower of the field," which, how gay and glorious ſoever, is fading and periſhing; and the greater the divine perfections are, the greater imperfection would mutability be; for as "the corruption of the beſt things is the worſt," ſo the better any thing is, ſo much the worſe it would be to have it liable to corruption and change.

And as mutability in God would darken all his other perfections, ſo would it take away the foundation and comfort of all religion; the ground of our faith, and hope, and fear, of our love and eſteem of God, would be quite taken away. We could have no great honour or eſteem for a being that is fickle and inconſtant; if his power and juſtice were uncertain, his threatnings would in a great meaſure loſe their awe and force; if his truth and faithfulneſs could fail, no promiſes and declarations, how gracious ſoever, would be any ſecurity or firm ground of truſt and confidence.

And this reaſoning is not the reſult of divine revelation, but clearly founded in the natural notions

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and suggestions of our minds, as will appear by citing one or two testimonies to this purpose, of those who had no other guide but natural light. Plato, in his Phœdo, inquires, "whether the most perfect "(that is God) be always the same, or sometimes "thus, and sometimes otherwise? that is (saith "he) whether that which is equality and goodness "and bounty itself, receives any the least change "at any time, and be not constant and uniform, "and of itself always the same, Καὶ ὐδαμῆ ὐδαμῶς "ἀλλόωσιν ὐδεμίαν ἐνδεχεται, and is never in any "wise, upon any account, subject to any change "or alteration whatsoever? To which he answers, "That it is necessary that he should be the same "and always alike." And lib. 2. de Repub. where he lays down the fundamental laws and constitutions of religion, he mentions these two (which, one would almost think, he borrowed from St. James, but that he lived so long before him) viz. first, "That God is the cause of all good, and in no wise "of any evil:" answerably to what our apostle here asserts, that "God cannot be tempted with "evil, neither tempteth he any man; but that "every good and perfect gift is from him." Secondly, "That God doth not deceive us, by "making various representations of himself to us; "sometimes in one form, and sometimes in another; for he is unchangeable, and always the same, "and cannot, τῆς ἑαυτὺ ἰδέας ἐκβαίνειν, pass out of "his own idea, or be any other than what he is:" which he further confirms by this excellent reasoning, "that which is the best and most perfect being is not liable to any alteration; but such a being is God, and therefore he cannot be changed "by any thing that is weaker and less perfect than

"him-

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" himſelf, and he cannot will to change himſelf; " for if he ſhould, it muſt either be for the better, " or for the worſe: it cannot be for the better; for " being already poſſeſt of all perfection, there can " be no acceſſion of any to him by any change; " and certainly there is no wiſe being, as God is, " that will change for the worſe; and therefore he " concludes, καλλίστος καὶ ἄριστος ὢν εἰς τὸ δυνατὸν μένει ἀεὶ ἁπλῶς καὶ τῇ αὐτῇ μορφῇ, " That being the " goodlieſt and beſt being that is poſſible, he " always continues ſimply the ſame." Seneca likewiſe, ſpeaking of the immutability of God's counſels (l. vi. de Benef.) *ſtatuerunt* (ſays he) *quæ non mutarent, neque unquam primi conſilii deos pœnitet*, " The gods make ſuch unchangeable decrees, and " never repent them of their firſt counſel."

2. This will yet more clearly appear from the divine revelation of the holy ſcriptures, which tell us, that God is unchangeable in his nature, and in his perfections, in all his decrees, and purpoſes, and promiſes: in his eſſence and being, Exod. iii. 14. " I am that I am;" this is his name, whereby he made known himſelf to the comfort of his people, and to the terror of the Egyptians their oppreſſors: Pſal. xc. 2. " From everlaſting to everlaſting thou " art God." Pſal. cii. 27. " Thou art the ſame, " and thy years fail not." Mal. iii. 6. " I am the " Lord, and change not." Hence it is that the title of the living God is ſo frequently attributed to him; and he ſwears by this, as denoting not only his eternity, but his unchangeableneſs; " as I live, " ſaith the Lord." Hither likewiſe we may refer thoſe texts where he is called the " incorruptible " God," Rom. i. 23. " The immortal King," 1 Tim. 17. and is ſaid " only to have immortali-

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"ty," 1 Tim. i. 16. And he is immutable likewiſe in his perfections; hence it is ſo often ſaid in the Pſalms, that "his goodneſs and his mercy endure "for ever; his righteouſneſs is likewiſe ſaid to en-"dure for ever." Pſal. cxi. 3. and Pſal. xxxvi. 6. "To be like the great mountains, not only viſible "and conſpicuous, but firm and immoveable;" and the ſame likewiſe is ſaid of his truth and faithfulneſs, Pſal. cxvii. 2. "His truth endureth for "ever;" and of his power, Eſa. xxvi. 4. "In the "LORD Jehovah is everlaſting ſtrength."

And ſo likewiſe in his decrees and purpoſes, Pſal. xxxiii. 11. "The counſel of the LORD ſtandeth for "ever, and the thoughts of his heart to all genera-"tions." Eſa. xiv. 24. "Surely as I have thought, "ſo ſhall it come to paſs; and as I have purpoſed, "ſo ſhall it ſtand." Numb. xxiii. 19. "GOD is not "a man, that he ſhould lie, or as the ſon of man, "that he ſhould repent: hath he ſpoken, and ſhall "not he do it? hath he ſaid it, and ſhall not he "bring it to paſs?" If he hath made any promiſe, or entered into any covenant with us, it is firm and immutable, Pſal. lxxxix. 33. "He will not ſuffer "his faithfulneſs to fail, his covenant will he not "break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of his "lips." His covenant and his promiſe are in themſelves immutable; but for our further aſſurance, GOD hath given us his oath, the higheſt ſign of immutability; ſo the apoſtle to the Hebrews tells us, chap. vi. 18. "That by two immutable things," (viz. his promiſe and his oath) "in which it is im-"poſſible for GOD to lie, we might have ſtrong "conſolation, who are fled for refuge to the hope "which is ſet before us." I proceed to the

III. Thing I promiſed, which is, to anſwer an objection,

objection, which may ſeem to lie againſt what hath been ſaid, from the mention ſo often made in ſcripture of GOD's repenting himſelf; as Gen. vi. 6. where it is ſaid that "it repented GOD that he had "made man." 1 Sam. xv. 11. That "he repented "that he had made Saul king:" and 2 Sam. xxiv. 16. When "the angel had ſtretched out his "hand over Jeruſalem to deſtroy it," it is ſaid, that "the LORD repented him of the evil:" and Pſal. cxxxv. 14. the LORD ſaith there, that "he will re-"pent himſelf concerning his ſervants." SERM. CXXXIII.

To all which I anſwer, that this expreſſion of GOD's repentance we are to underſtand (as many others in ſcripture) after the manner of men, and as ſpoken by way of condeſcention and accommodation to our weakneſs and capacity, and not as caſting any imputation of mutability and inconſtancy upon GOD; as if out of levity, or for want of foreſight, he did alter his mind: but when GOD is ſaid "to repent that he made man, or that he made "Saul king," the change was not in him, but them; and it ſignifies, not that GOD was abſolutely deceived in his expectation, but that things had fallen out contrary to all reaſonable expectation; and therefore the ſcripture clothes GOD with the human paſſion of repenting and grieving for what he hath done, as men uſe to do when they are greatly diſappointed and fall ſhort of their expectation.

And as for the other inſtances, wherein GOD is ſaid "to repent him of the evils threatned," the expreſſion only ſignifies thus much, that GOD doth not execute that which ſeemed to us to have been his peremptory purpoſe and reſolution; that is, he is pleaſed to do otherwiſe than his threatning ſeemed openly to expreſs, becauſe of ſome tacit condition

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implied in it, which he did not think fit to acquaint us with. And this doth not at all derogate from the conſtancy and immutability of GOD: for when GOD did threaten, he ſpake what he did really purpoſe and intend, if ſomething did not intervene to prevent the judgment threatned, upon which he was reſolved at that time when he threatned, to be taken off, and to ſtay his hand: and in thus doing, GOD doth not *mutare conſilium ſed ſententiam*; "he doth "not change his inward counſel and purpoſe, but "takes off the ſentence," which was paſt with reſerved conditions, and unknown to us, on purpoſe to urge us the more effectually to repentance.

And that GOD uſually reſerves ſuch conditions, not only in his threatnings, but ſometimes alſo in his promiſes, appears from that remarkable text, Jer. xviii. 7, 8, 9, 10. "At what inſtant I ſhall ſpeak "concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, "to pluck up, and to pull down, and to deſtroy "it; if that nation, againſt whom I have pronounced, turn from the evil, I will repent of the evil "that I thought to do unto them: at what inſtant "I ſhall ſpeak concerning a nation, and concerning "a kingdom, to build and to plant it; if it do evil "in my ſight, that it obey not my voice, then I "will repent of the good wherewith I ſaid I would "benefit them." And from this very conſideration, the ſame prophet encourageth the people to repentance, Jer. xxvi. 13. "Therefore now amend "your ways, and your doings, and obey the voice "of the LORD your GOD, and the LORD will repent him of the evil he hath pronounced againſt "you." And we have a famous inſtance of this in the caſe of Nineveh, the deſtruction whereof within forty days after, GOD had openly proclaimed by his prophet

prophet; yet he ſtops the execution of the ſentence, upon their repentance, Jonah iii. 10. "The men of "Nineveh turned from their evil ways, and the "Lord repented of the evil he ſaid he would do "unto them, and he did it not." SERM. CXXXIII.

All that now remains, is to apply this doctrine of the immutability of the divine nature to ourſelves; and the conſideration of it may ſerve to ſeveral good purpoſes, both in reference to bad and good men.

Firſt, in regard to ſinners and wicked men.

And, 1ſt, The unchangeableneſs of God is matter of great terror to wicked men. Let but the ſinner conſider what God is, and the conſideration of his unchangeable nature muſt needs terrify him: "He "is a holy God, and of purer eyes than to behold "iniquity," Hab. i. 12. "He is not a God, that "hath pleaſure in wickedneſs, neither ſhall evil dwell "with him: the fooliſh ſhall not ſtand in his ſight, "he hateth all the workers of iniquity," Pſal. v. 4, 5. "He is likewiſe a juſt God, and will by no means "clear the guilty, nor let ſin go unpuniſhed," Exod. xxxiv. 7. He is alſo omnipotent, and is able to execute the vengeance threatned againſt ſinners. "Who knoweth the power of thine anger?" Pſal. xc. 11. "Thou even thou art to be feared; and who "may ſtand in thy ſight when once thou art an-"gry?" Pſal. lxxvi. 7. "Strong is the Lord "God who judgeth," Rev. xviii. 8. And, which gives a ſad accent to all this, he that is thus holy, and juſt, and powerful, continues for ever the ſame, and will never alter or put off any of theſe properties, will never ceaſe to hate iniquity, and to be an implacable enemy to all impenitent ſinners: and is it not a "fearful thing to fall into the hands of" this holy, and juſt, and omnipotent "God, who "lives

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" lives for ever," and can " puniſh for ever?" Let all obſtinate ſinners hear this, and tremble: you cannot be more obſtinately bent to continue in your wicked ways, than God is peremptorily reſolved to make you miſerable. If you be determined upon a ſinful courſe; God is alſo determined how he will deal with you, that " he will not ſpare," but " that " his anger and jealouſy ſhall make againſt you," and that " all the curſes that are written in his book " ſhall light upon you," and that " he will blot out " your name from under heaven; he hath ſworn in " his wrath, that" unbelieving and impenitent ſinners " ſhall not enter into his reſt:" and for the greater aſſurance of the thing, and that we may not think, that there is any condition implied in theſe threatnings, he hath confirmed them by an oath, that by this immutable ſign, " in which it is impoſſible " for God to lie," ſinners might have ſtrong terrors, and not be able to fly to any in hopes of refuge.

2dly, The conſideration of God's unchangeableneſs, ſhould likewiſe be a very powerful argument to urge ſinners to repentance. If they will but leave their ſins, and turn to him, they will find him ready to receive them upon their repentance and ſubmiſſion; for " he is a God gracious and merciful, ſlow to " anger, and ready to forgive;" he is " unchange- " ably good," and " his mercy endureth for ever:" but if they will not come in, and ſubmit to theſe terms, there is nothing before them but ruin and deſtruction; nothing then " remains but a fearful look- " ing for of judgment, and fiery indignation to con- " ſume them." God hath declared to us the terms of our pardon and peace, and if we will not come up to them, he is at a point, he cannot change his nature, nor will he alter the terms of his covenant: there

there is a perfect and eternal oppoſition between the holy nature of God, and an impenitent ſinner; and 'tis impoſſible ſuch an one ſhould be happy, till this oppoſition be removed; and to do that, there are but two ways imaginable, by changing God, or by changing ourſelves. The nature of God is fixed and unalterable; God cannot recede from his own pure nature; therefore we muſt depart from our ſinful and corrupt nature. God cannot quit his holineſs; therefore we muſt leave our ſins: we can have no hope to change God, therefore we muſt change ourſelves. Rectify, ſinner, thine own corrupt nature, and renounce thy luſts; do not venture upon impoſſibilities; rather think of altering thy ſinful nature, which may be changed, than of altering the divine nature, which is eſſentially immutable, "with "whom is no variableneſs, nor ſhadow of turning." God hath once condeſcended ſo far, as "to take "our nature upon him," to make us capable of happineſs: but if this will not do, he can go no lower, he will not, he cannot put off his own nature, to make us happy. SERM. CXXXIII.

Secondly, in reference to good men, the conſideration of God's unchangeableneſs is matter of great conſolation to them; in all the changes and viciſſitudes of the world; their main comfort and hope is built upon a rock, "the rock of ages," as the expreſſion is in the prophet Iſaiah, xxvi. 4. it relies upon the unchangeable goodneſs and faithfulneſs of God, "all whoſe promiſes are yea, and amen," truth and certainty. All other ſupports and hopes may fail us; but "God will not ſuffer his faithful-"neſs to fail; his covenant will he not break, nor "alter the thing which is gone out of his lips," as the pſalmiſt aſſures us, Pſal. lxxxix. 33. Men may

break

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break their word, and be leſs than their promiſes; but "GOD is faithful, who hath promiſed to give "grace and glory, and to withhold no good thing "from them that walk uprightly. He is not as "man, that he ſhould lie, or as the ſon of man, "that he ſhould repent. Hath he ſpoken, and "ſhall he not do it? hath he ſaid it, and ſhall not "he bring it to paſs?"

If there be any thing that hath the appearance of a change in GOD, it is uſually on the merciful ſide; as when he ſtops the execution of his threatnings, upon the repentance of a ſinful nation; as in that remarkable text which I mentioned before, Jer. xviii. 7, 8. "At what inſtant I ſhall ſpeak concern-"ing a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck "up, and to pull down, and to deſtroy it; if that "nation againſt whom I have pronounced, turn "from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I "thought to do unto them:" and ſo likewiſe when his faithful people and ſervants are in great diſtreſs, and there is no viſible help and means of relief; in this caſe likewiſe GOD is ſaid to repent and to appear for their reſcue. Deut. xxxii. 36. "The LORD "ſhall judge his people, and repent himſelf for his "ſervants, when he ſeeth that their power is gone."

Thus we ſhould comfort ourſelves in the greateſt extremities, with the conſideration of the immutable goodneſs and faithfulneſs of GOD. The things of the world are mutable, and the men of the world; even thoſe things which ſeem moſt conſtant, as the heavens: and to be ſettled upon the ſureſt foundations, as the earth; yet theſe ſhall be changed: Pſal. cii. 25, 26, 27. "Of old haſt thou laid the founda-"tions of the earth, and the heavens are the work "of thy hands: they ſhall periſh, but thou ſhalt "en-

" endure; all of them ſhall wax old like a garment; SERM.
" as a veſture ſhalt thou change them, and they CXXXIII.
" ſhall be changed: but thou art the ſame, and thy
" years ſhall have no end." From whence the pſalmiſt infers this comfort to the church and people of GOD, v. 28. " The children of thy ſervants
" ſhall continue, and their ſeed ſhall be eſtabliſhed
" before thee."

Nothing that is mutable can be a ſolid foundation of comfort and confidence. Men are inconſtant, and riches are uncertain, and all other things which men commonly truſt to; and therefore the apoſtle " chargeth them that are rich in this world, not to " truſt in uncertain riches, but in the living GOD." He only that lives for ever is a firm foundation of hope and confidence.

When GOD would comfort the Iſraelites in Egypt under their great oppreſſion, he bids Moſes only to declare to them his immutability, Exod. iii. 14. Say unto them, " I am that I am, hath ſent me unto
" you." And this is the great comfort of Chriſtians, that he who is their SAVIOUR, and their hope, is " the ſame yeſterday, to day, and for ever: he
" that was, and that is, and that is to come," in all durations the ſame.

We are continually changing, and are not the ſame we were; ſome of us were young, and now are old; once, perhaps, flouriſhed in great proſperity, but now are poor and needy; were once ſtrong and healthful, but now ſickly and weak: it ſhould comfort us in all theſe changes, that " GOD is ſtill
" the ſame," and he alone is inſtead of all other comforts and ſupports: when all other things fail, we may " rejoice in the LORD, and joy in the GOD of
" our ſalvation." Youth, and health, and riches,

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and friends may forſake us; but GOD hath promiſed, that "he will never leave us nor forſake us;" that "he will not leave us when we are old, nor forſake "us when our ſtrength faileth;" when "our "ſtrength fails," and "our heart fails," then is he "the ſtrength of our hearts," and our "portion for "ever;" and when our great change ſhall come, and the terrors of death ſhall take hold of us, we have ſtill the ſame comfort, "the LORD liveth, and "bleſſed be the GOD of our ſalvation."

In a word, the conſideration of GOD's immutability ſhould keep us fixed and unmoved in all the changes and accidents of this world, and not apt to be ſtartled and ſurpriſed at them; according to that of the pſalmiſt, "he ſhall not be afraid of evil "tidings, becauſe his heart is fixed, truſting in GOD." This ſhould make us conſtant to him and his truth, "ſtedfaſt and unmoveable, and always abounding "in the work of the LORD, for as much as we "know, that our labour ſhall not be in vain in the "LORD;" it ſhould make us "hold faſt the pro-"feſſion of our faith without wavering," in full aſſurance, that GOD "will be as good to us as his "word," and in a firm hope and perſuaſion "of "that eternal life, which GOD that cannot lie hath "promiſed."

SER-

SERMON CXXXIV.

The knowledge of God.

1 SAM. ii. 3.

The LORD *is a* GOD *of knowledge.*

I Come now to ſpeak of thoſe properties and perfections which relate to the divine underſtanding, and will, and manner, and power of acting. Knowledge conſiders things abſolutely, and in themſelves; wiſdom conſiders the reſpects and relation of things one to another, and under the notion of means and ends. The knowledge of GOD is a perfect comprehenſion of the nature of all things, with all their powers, and qualities, and circumſtances; the wiſdom of GOD is a perfect comprehenſion of the reſpects and relation of things one to another; of their harmony and oppoſition; of their fitneſs and unfitneſs to ſuch and ſuch ends. The knowledge of GOD only implies his bare underſtanding of things; but his wiſdom implies the ſkill of ordering and diſpoſing things to the beſt ends and purpoſes, to make every thing, and to govern and adminiſter all things in number, weight, and meaſure. I ſhall at preſent ſpeak of the firſt of theſe, the knowledge of GOD; which, as I ſaid, is a perfect comprehenſion of the nature of all things, and of every thing belonging to their nature: of the powers, and qualities, and circumſtances of things.

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Theſe words ſignify GOD to be the fountain of knowledge; that is, that he poſſeſſeth it himſelf, and communicates it to others. In the handling of this, I ſhall

First,

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First, endeavour to prove, that this attribute belongs to GOD.

Secondly, shew the perfection and the prerogatives of the divine knowledge.

Thirdly, draw some practical inferences from the whole.

First, for the proof of it, I shall attempt it two ways.

1. From the dictates of natural light and reason.

2. From scripture or divine revelation.

1. From the dictates of natural light and reason. I begin with this first; because, unless this be established, all divine revelation falls to the ground; unless natural reason assures us, that GOD is endowed with knowledge and understanding, it is in vain to enquire after divine revelation. For to make any revelation credible, two things are requisite on the part of the revealer, ability and integrity; that he have a perfect knowledge and understanding of the thing which he reveals, so that he cannot be deceived himself; and so much goodness and truth, that he will not deceive us. Now unless our reason assures us that GOD is endowed with knowledge and understanding, the first condition is evidently wanting, viz. ability, and consequently the second, integrity; for there cannot be goodness and veracity without knowledge.

This being premised, I proceed to the proof of it from such arguments as our natural reason suggests to us. I have formerly told you, that the divine perfections are not to be proved by way of demonstration, but by way of conviction, by shewing the absurdities and inconveniences of the contrary; for if we deny knowledge to GOD, we must deny it to be a perfection; we must deny it to be in any of the creatures; we must attribute many other imperfections

fections to GOD; all which are abſurd to our natural reaſon; for natural reaſon dictates to us, that knowledge is a perfection, that it is to be found in the creatures, and that the denial of it to GOD will argue many other imperfections in the divine nature; now theſe are ſo many arguments which natural reaſon offers to us to prove, that "knowledge belongs "to GOD." SERM CXXXIV.

1. It is a perfection, and therefore belongs to GOD. Natural reaſon tells us, though the ſcripture had not ſaid it, that "knowledge excels ignorance as "much as light doth darkneſs;" now whatever is perfect and excellent is to be attributed to the divine nature: for this is the firſt notion we have of GOD, that he is "a being abſolutely perfect."

2. Knowledge is to be found in ſome of the creatures, and therefore is much more in GOD the creator, becauſe it is derived from him. Our very underſtandings, whereby we know GOD, or any thing elſe, are an argument that knowledge and underſtanding are in GOD. If "he gives wiſdom to the "wiſe, and knowledge to them that know under-"ſtanding," if he communicates this perfection to the creatures, he himſelf is much more poſſeſt of it. The ſcripture indeed uſeth this argument, but I mention it as that which natural reaſon doth ſuggeſt to the moſt brutiſh and ignorant of men. Pſal. xciv. 8, 9, 10. "Underſtand, ye brutiſh among the peo-"ple; and ye fools, when will ye be wiſe? he that "planted the ear, ſhall he not hear? he that formed "the eye, ſhall he not ſee?"

3. The denial of this perfection to GOD, argues many other imperfections in the divine nature. Nothing would more eclipſe the divine nature, than to take away this perfection from it; this would bring

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an univerſal obſcurity upon GOD's other perfections; this would be to put out the light of heaven, and to turn "the brightneſs of the morning" into the "ſhadow of death." If we remove this perfection from GOD, we deny his wiſdom. He that does not know the nature and qualities of things, cannot know how to apply means to ends, to fit or ſuit one thing to another. And we weaken his power. What an impotent and ineffectual thing would power be without knowledge? what irregular things would it produce? what untoward combinations of effects would there be, if infinite power were let looſe to act without the conduct of knowledge and underſtanding? And, conſequently, we take away his providence; for without knowledge there can be no counſel, nor fore-caſt of events, no proviſion for the future, no government of the world. And this is not all; for without knowledge there could be no ſuch thing as goodneſs; for he is not good that does good out of ignorance, or from a blind neceſſity. There could be no veracity, nor juſtice, nor mercy in GOD; for all theſe ſuppoſe knowledge. He that ſpeaks truth muſt know it; he that is juſt muſt underſtand right from wrong; he that ſhews mercy, muſt know who are miſerable, and how they may be relieved: and not to labour in a thing ſo plain and eaſy; take away the knowledge of GOD, and you render him incapable of any honour from his creatures; for if we know not what honour we do him, it is loſt labour to give him any. And that we may ſee theſe are the deductions of natural reaſon, without the advantage of revelation, we ſhall find the heathens, who were deſtitute of divine revelation, did attribute this perfection to GOD. Tully tells us, that Thales was wont to ſay, *Deos omnia cernere*;

cernere; and we know the heathens were wont to swear, *Diis immortalibus teſtibus interpoſitis*, which is an owning of his omniſcience: *Quis enim non timeat Deum omnia pervidentem, & cogitantem, & animadvertentem, curioſum & negotii plenum Deum*: de Nat. Deor. l. 1. SERM. CXXXIV.

2. From ſcripture and divine revelation. I will not heap up all thoſe teſtimonies of ſcripture, which might be gathered together upon this argument; I will only inſtance in two or three: Job xxxvi. 4. "He that is perfect in knowledge, is with thee:" xxxvii. 16. "Doſt thou know the wondrous works "of him who is perfect in knowledge?"

Hither we may refer thoſe texts which repreſent God, by way of condeſcenſion to our infirmity, as having eyes and ears, which ſignify his knowledge of what is done in the world; and thoſe which ſpeak of him as communicating to us all the knowledge which we have; "he giveth wiſdom to the wiſe, "and underſtanding to them that know underſtand-"ing," Dan. ii. 21. And thoſe which ſpeak of God, as knowing the moſt ſecret things, "the hid-"den things of darkneſs," the hearts and the thoughts of men; and thoſe things which are at the greateſt diſtance, as future things; and of the greateſt uncertainty, as the contingent acts of free creatures; each of theſe I ſhall particularly conſider; for in proving that God knows all theſe, his knowledge of all other things will be proved with advantage: for if any thing be out of the reach of the divine underſtanding, it muſt in all probability be either thoſe things which are ſecret and hidden, as mens ſecret actions, or their thoughts; or elſe thoſe things which are to come, and depend upon no certain cauſe, as future contingencies: and the proving of this may

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be of great uſe to us, as having a great influence upon practice; it tends very much to the advancement of religion, and the good government of our lives. I begin with the

1. Of theſe, viz. That God takes very exact and particular notice of all the actions of men, even thoſe that are moſt ſecret. And in the handling of this, I ſhall ſpeak diſtinctly to theſe three things.

1. That God takes knowledge of all our actions; "his eyes are upon the ways of man, and he ſeeth "all his goings," Job xxxiv. 21.

2. That he is a curious obſerver of them; "he "ſeeth all his goings, he marks all his ſteps," takes very exact and particular notice of all that we do.

3. He takes notice of thoſe actions which are moſt ſecret and hidden; "there is no darkneſs nor "ſhadow of death, where the workers of iniquity "may hide themſelves," Job xxxiv. 22.

1. That God takes notice of all our actions. And that this notion was planted in the mind of man, and a beam of the light which comes with us into the world, will appear by the general agreement of heathens in it. I will but produce one or two teſtimonies to this purpoſe. Tully lays down this principle, as that which makes men regularly and orderly, and fit for ſociety: *ſit igitur hoc perſuaſum civibus, qualis quiſque ſit, quid agat, quid in ſe admittat deos intueri.* Socrates, as Xenophon tells us, was wont to ſay, πάντα θεὸς εἰδέναι τὰ τε λεγόμενα καὶ πραττόμενα καὶ τὰ σιγῇ βουλευόμενα. Arrian, in his diſcourſe upon Epictetus, tells us, it is neceſſary that every one ſhould be perſuaded of this, ὅτι ἕκαστον τῶν πραττομένων ἐφορᾶται ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ, "that "every thing that is done by men is ſeen of God."

The

The ſcripture frequently mentions this, Pſal. cxxxix. 1, &c. Prov. v. 21. "The ways of man "are before the eyes of the LORD, and he ponder- "eth all his goings." Jer. xxxii. 19. "Thine eyes "are open upon all the ways of the ſons of men, to "give every one according to his ways, and accord- "ing to the fruit of his doings." SERM. CXXXIV.

2. He is a curious obſerver, one that takes exact notice of all that we do. Job ſaith, "he ſeeth all "our ſteps;" and Solomon, that "he pondereth "all our goings;" the word is, "he weighs them "in a balance." So 1 Sam. ii. 3. "The LORD is "a GOD of knowledge, by him actions are weigh- "ed." Job xxxi. 4. "Doth he not ſee my ways, "and count all my ſteps?" which doth not imply the difficulty, but the perfection and exactneſs of GOD's knowledge; he knows the qualities of our actions, and all the circumſtances of them, all the degrees of good and evil that are in them, whatever may commend an action, or blemiſh it; whatever may aggravate a ſin, or excuſe it. Iſa. xxvi. 7. "Thou moſt upright doth weigh the path of the "juſt." There is not a good word that we ſpeak, but GOD hears it, Mal. iii. 16. "And the LORD "hearkened and heard, and a book of remembrance "was written before him;" and all we do is "not- "ed in his book," Pſal. lvi. 8.

3. He takes notice of thoſe actions which are moſt ſecret and hidden, the good as well as bad; when we "do our alms in ſecret," when we "enter into "our cloſets, and ſhut the doors, our Father ſeeth "in ſecret," Mat. vi. Nor can we retire ourſelves to any place, where we can ſin ſo as GOD ſhall not ſee us, where we can hide our ſins from his ſight, or ourſelves from his wrath. Hear how ſenſibly a

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heathen ſpeaks of this: ὅταν κλείσητε τὰς θύρας, καὶ σκότον ἔνδον ποιήσητε, μέμνησθε μηδέποτε λέγειν ὅτι μόνοι ἐσμὲν· οὐ γὰρ ἴσε, ἀλλ' ὁ θεὸς ἔνδον ἐστὶ, καὶ ὁ ὑμέτερος δαίμων ἐστὶ, τίς τούτοις χρεία φωτὸς, εἰς τὸ βλέπειν τὰ ποιεῖτε; Arrian in Ep. l. 1. c. 14.

The ſcripture is full of teſtimonies to this purpoſe, Pſal. xc. 8. "Thou haſt ſet our iniquities be-"fore thee, and our ſecret ſins in the light of thy "countenance;" thoſe ſins which we commit in the dark are in the light of the divine knowledge, "darkneſs and light are all one to him;" Pſal. cxxxix. 11, 12. Jer. xvi. 17, 23, 24. "Can any hide him-"ſelf in ſecret places, that I ſhall not ſee him?"

II. GOD knows the hearts and thoughts of men, which implies theſe two things.

1ſt. His perfect knowledge of them.

2dly. That this is his peculiar prerogative.

1ſt. GOD perfectly knows the hearts of men; Jer. xvii. 10. "I the LORD ſearch the heart, and try "the reins;" where, by heart and reins, which are the moſt inward parts of the body, and lie leaſt open to diſcovery, are ſignified the moſt ſecret thoughts and motions of the ſoul; theſe GOD is ſaid to ſearch and try, not as if it were a work of labour and difficulty to the divine knowledge to penetrate the hearts of men, and to dive into their thoughts, but to ſignify to us the perfection and exactneſs of the divine knowledge; as when men would know a thing exactly, they ſearch into every part of it, and examine every thing narrowly; ſo GOD is ſaid "to "ſearch the heart," to ſignify to us that he knows the hearts of men, as thoroughly as we do any thing upon the ſtricteſt ſearch and moſt diligent examination; upon the ſame account he is ſaid elſewhere in ſcripture "to weigh the ſpirits of men;" Prov. xvi. 2. "All

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2. "All the ways of man are clean in his own eyes, "but the LORD weigheth the ſpirits;" that is, he hath as perfect a knowledge of the ſecret motions and inclinations of mens hears, as men have of thoſe things which they weigh in a balance with the greateſt exactneſs.

Now that GOD hath this perfect knowledge of mens hearts, the ſcripture frequently declares to us; that he knows the hearts of all men, 1 Kings viii. 39. "For thou, even thou, knoweſt the hearts of all the "children of men." 1 Chron. xxviii. 9. "The LORD "ſearcheth all hearts, and underſtandeth all the ima-"ginations of the thoughts." How cloſe and reſerved ſoever men may be, what diſguiſe ſoever they may uſe to hide their purpoſes from men, yet GOD ſees them; the things which are moſt dark and ſecret are open to his view, Pſal. xliv. 21. "He "knoweth the ſecrets of the hearts." Prov. xv. 11. "Hell and deſtruction are before him, how much "more the hearts of the children of men?" Whatever pretences men may make, GOD ſees through them, and diſcovers the very intentions of their hearts. Pſal. vii. 9. "The righteous LORD trieth the "heart and reins." Heb. iv. 13. It is ſaid there of "the word of GOD," that it is "a diſcerner of the "thoughts and intentions of the heart; for all "things are naked and open to the eye of him with "whom we have to do, and there is no creature "that is not manifeſt in his ſight;" nay he knows our thoughts at a diſtance, what they will be, before any actually are, Pſal. cxxxix. 2. "Thou knoweſt "my thoughts afar off." It is true indeed every man is conſcious to his own thoughts, and privy to the motions of his own mind, when they are preſent and when they are paſt, if he have not forgot them;

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but no man knows what he ſhall think to-morrow; but this GOD knows, for he knows us more intimately and thoroughly than we do ourſelves; "GOD is greater than our hearts, and knows all "things," 1 John iii. 20.

And though the ſcripture had not revealed this ſo plainly, yet we had not been wholly ignorant of it; it is a principle implanted in us, and born with us, as being part of that natural notion which men have of GOD; the reaſon of our minds tell us, that GOD knows our hearts; and the fears and jealouſies of our minds are an evidence of it.

(1ſt.) The reaſon of every man's mind tells him, that the ſupreme being, whom we call GOD, is endowed with all perfection, and among his other perfections, that "he excels in knowledge;" and to the perfection of knowledge it is required, that it extends itſelf to all objects, and that nothing be exempted from it. The knowledge of GOD in reſpect of all objects, is like the ſun in reſpect of this lower world, "nothing is hid from the light of it." We have naturally this apprehenſion of GOD, that he is an immenſe being, every where preſent, that he intimately penetrates all places and things, and conſequently that he is preſent to our ſpirits, and ſees all the motions of our minds, and diſcerns the very ſecrets of our hearts; and there can be no ſuch thing as ſecrecy and retirement from an eye that is every where, and a knowledge that pierceth into all things.

And to convince us that theſe are the dictates of natural reaſon, without the help and aſſiſtance of divine revelation, we ſhall find that the heathens, who had only the advantage of natural light, were firmly poſſeſt with this apprehenſion, that GOD knows the hearts of men. This may be ſufficiently collected from

from the frequent ſayings of the wiſer heathens to this purpoſe; that the beſt and moſt acceptable worſhip of the Deity is that which is inward, that of the heart and mind. To this ſenſe Tully ſpeaks, *cultus autem deorum eſt optimus, idemque caſtiſſimus atque ſanctiſſimus pleniſſimuſque pietatis, ut eos ſemper purâ, integrâ, atque incorruptâ mente & voce veneremur*; "The beſt and holieſt worſhip of the gods "is to worſhip them with a pure, and upright, and "ſincere mind." To the ſame purpoſe is that known ſaying of the poet, SERM. CXXXIV.

Compoſitum jus faſque animi, ſanctoſque receſſus
Mentis, & incoctum generoſo pectus honeſto,
Hæc cedo ut admoveam templis & farre litabo.

"Do but offer to GOD a mind inwardly reſolved to "be juſt and honeſt, and the plaineſt ſacrifice "will pleaſe him." Now from hence, that they judged the purity of our hearts and thoughts, and an honeſt diſpoſition of mind, to be moſt acceptable to their gods, we may certainly conclude, that they did moſt firmly believe that GOD knows the ſecrets of mens hearts; otherwiſe there had been no need for men to endeavour to recommend themſelves this way to the divine acceptance.

But we need not argue this by conſequence; there are many expreſs paſſages in their writings, which do ſufficiently ſignify their belief of this principle. Thales, one of their moſt ancient philoſophers, being aſked, "if any juſt man could conceal himſelf from "GOD?" he anſwered, "he cannot ſo much as hide "from him the very thoughts and deſign of it." Socrates (as Xenophon tells us) was wont to inculcate this principle upon his ſcholars, that "the gods "know all things, what we ſay, and what we do,

"and

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" and what we think in ſilence." To the ſame purpoſe Arrian in his diſſertations upon Epictetus, laying down the principles of a virtuous life, " firſt of all, " ſaith he, we muſt learn this, that there is a GOD who " takes care of the world, and that there is nothing " hid from him, not only what we do, but not ſo " much as what we think and deſign." So likewiſe Tully in his book of laws, " let every man be firmly perſuaded of this, that the gods ſee what every " man is, and with what mind and devotion they " ſerve them:" I will add but one teſtimony more, and that is of Seneca in his epiſtles: *Nihil Deo clauſum eſt, intereſt animis noſtris, & cogitationibus mediis intervenit,* " we can keep nothing cloſe from " GOD, for he is preſent to our minds, and intimate " to our thoughts;" ſo that you ſee this principle is deeply rooted in the minds of men, and that men do naturally reaſon themſelves into it.

(2.) The natural fears of men are likewiſe a ſecret acknowledgment of this; and I take this to be a great truth, that a man's natural actions, and ſuch as happen upon ſurpriſe and without deliberation, are a better argument of the intimate ſenſe of our minds, and do more truly diſcover what lies at the bottom of our hearts, and what notions are natural to us, than our contrived and deliberate diſcourſe. If I ſee a man upon the ſudden ſight of a ſerpent recoil and ſtart back, though he tell me never ſo often that he is not afraid, yet I am ſufficiently convinced of the contrary, becauſe I ſee in his countenance and carriage a natural acknowledgment of fear and danger; ſo if men find that upon the deſigning of a ſecret wickedneſs, which never went further than their own hearts, their conſciences do ſting and laſh them, that they have a ſenſe of guilt, and feel inward frights

and horrors, whatever they may ſay to the contrary, this is a natural acknowledgment of an inviſible eye that ſees them, and diſallows their wicked deſigns. If that be true which the heathen poets ſay, that SERM. CXXXIV.

Scelus intra ſe tacitum qui cogitat ullum,
Facti crimen habet.

" He that meditates any ſecret wickedneſs in his " heart, is guilty to himſelf, as if he had commit- " ted it." This is a plain confeſſion, that the man ſtands in awe of ſomething beſides himſelf, and is jealous that there is one that is conſcious to what he thinks.

2. That to have a perfect and thorough knowledge of mens hearts, is the peculiar prerogative of God. This is implied in the anſwer to that queſtion, " who can know the heart of man? Jer. xvii. 10. " I the Lord ſearch the heart, and try the " reins;" this is the prerogative of God, and one of his chief titles, that he is καρδιογνώστης, a knower of the heart, 1 Kings viii. 39. " Thou, even thou on- " ly knoweſt the hearts of all the children of men." Men may make a probable conjecture at the thoughts and deſigns of others, from their words and actions; but God only knows them. Men are conſcious to their own thoughts and purpoſes; " the ſpirit of a " man that is in him, knows the things of a man;" but they cannot ſee into the ſecrets of another man's mind; 'tis God alone that knows the hearts of all men; the heart of a man is a privileged place, and the ſecret and inward workings of it are not ſubject to the cognizance of any but God alone. The limits of human knowledge are the outward appearances of actions: 1 Sam. xvi. 7. " The Lord ſeeth " not as man ſeeth; for man looketh on the out- " ward

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" ward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the " heart;" our knowledge is but ſuperficial, and glides upon the outſide and ſurface of things, but the divine knowledge pierceth to the very center of every thing. Now the darkeſt place, the moſt inward retirement, the privateſt cloſet in the whole world, is the heart of man, and this GOD only is privy to; *Deus auctor omnium & ſpeculator omnium, à quo nihil ſecretum eſſe poteſt, tenebris intereſt, intereſt & cogitationibus noſtris quaſi alteris tenebris*, ſaith Min. Fœlix, " GOD made all things, and ſees all " things, and therefore nothing can be ſecret from " him; he is preſent in darkneſs, and he is preſent " to the thoughts of men, which are as it were " another and a thicker darkneſs."

The devil indeed pretends to this knowledge; he would take upon him to know the integrity of Job's heart better than GOD himſelf; and that notwithſtanding the teſtimony which GOD gave of his integrity, yet if he were but ſoundly tried by affliction, he would renounce GOD, and curſe him to his face: but the event proved how groundleſs and malicious this ſuggeſtion was. But there is a far greater difficulty in this matter, from the paſſages of ſome divines concerning the devil's immediate acceſs to the minds of men, and his power to caſt wicked thoughts into them; which ſeems by conſequence to grant him ſome knowledge of mens hearts; for by the ſame reaſon that he can imprint thoughts upon mens minds, he may ſee thoſe that are imprinted there.

That the devil is a very ſagacious ſpirit, and can make very ſhrewd conjectures at the bent and inclination of mens minds, and the probable workings of our thoughts, from a general knowledge and obſervation

ſervation of our tempers and paſſions, of our inter- SERM.
eſts and deſigns, and from the general tenor of our CXXXIV.
actions in public and private, and from our prayers and confeſſions to God (if he permit him at any time to be ſo near good men) I think there is no doubt: but this is far from a knowledge of our hearts; all this is but conjecture, and ſuch as men may make of one another in a low degree.

But as to the buſineſs of caſting blaſphemous and deſpairing thoughts into the minds of men, to this I would ſay theſe three things.

1. That there are few of theſe caſes which may not more probably be reſolved into the wickedneſs and infidelity of mens hearts, or into the darkneſs and melancholy of our tempers, which are apt to raiſe and ſuggeſt ſtrange thoughts to men, and ſuch as we may be apt to think have no riſe from our ſelves, not conſidering what an odd and ſtrange influence the diſorder of our bodily humours may have upon our minds, as we ſee in violent fevers, and ſeveral other diſeaſes; and melancholy, though the workings of it are more ſtill and quiet, is as truly a diſeaſe as any other; ſo that I chuſe rather to aſcribe as much of theſe to a bodily diſtemper as may be, becauſe it is a very uncomfortable conſideration, to think that the devil hath ſuch an immediate power upon the minds of men.

2. I do not ſee how by any means it can be granted, without prejudice to this prerogative of God, which the ſcripture plainly gives him, of being "the "only knower of the heart," that the devil can have ſo immediate an acceſs to our minds, as to put wicked thoughts into them; nor can I think, that when it is ſaid, 1 Chron. xxi. 1. that "Satan pro-"voked David to number the people," and Luke

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xxii. 3. That "the devil entered into Judas," and Acts v. 3. That "ſatan had filled the heart of Ana- "nias to lie unto the Holy Ghoſt," and Eph. ii. 2. That "the devil is the ſpirit that worketh in the "children of diſobedience:" I ſay, I cannot think that any, or all of theſe expreſſions do amount to ſuch an immediate power of putting wicked thoughts into mens minds; but they only ſignify, that the devil hath a greater hand in ſome ſins than others, and that a heart wickedly bent and inclined, give him a great advantage to tempt men more powerfully, by preſenting the occaſion of ſuch wicked thoughts and actions to them; for it is uſual, in ſcripture-phraſe, as to aſcribe all good motions to GOD's ſpirit, ſo all evil thoughts and actions to the devil, not that he is the immediate cauſe of them, but becauſe he is always ready to tempt men to them, and one way or other to promote them.

3. I ſee no reaſon to grant (as many have done) an immediate power to the devil over the fancies and imaginations of men, and that he may know the workings of them, though not the ſecret thoughts of mens minds; for this ſeems to me to be in effect to grant him the knowledge of mens hearts, and to give him a key to that cloſet which GOD hath reſerved to himſelf: for it is a very nice diſtinction which is here made between the thoughts of mens minds, and the image of their fancies; and if theſe ſhould happen to be but words that ſignify the ſame thing, we ſhall unawares intrench upon the prerogative of GOD. Therefore becauſe the ſcripture is a ſtranger to theſe nice and ſubtile diſtinctions between the imaginations of the fancy, and the thoughts of the heart, I think it is much ſafer to aſſert the prerogative of GOD in that latitude that the ſcrip-

ſcripture uſeth the word heart; for all the inward motions of the mind, for the thoughts and intentions of the heart, and roundly to affirm that all the inward motions of our ſouls are totally exempt from the immediate cognizance of any other ſpirit but God's alone; and that neither angel nor devil hath any further knowledge of them, than may be collected and inferred in a way of probable conjecture from the particular knowledge of mens tempers and habits and deſigns, and the courſe of their actions. I proceed to the SERM. CXXXIV.

III. Particular; God's knowledge of future events. This God purpoſes as the way to diſcern the true God from idols, Iſaiah xli. 21, &c. "Produce "your cauſe, ſaith the Lord, bring forth your "ſtrong reaſons, ſaith the king of Jacob;" that is, let them bring ſome argument that may convince us that they are gods; and he inſtanceth in foretelling future events, ver. 22. "Let them ſhew the "former things, what they be, that we may conſider "them, and know the latter end of them; or declare "us things for to come. Shew the things that are to "come hereafter, that we may know that ye are "gods." God puts it upon this iſſue, if they can "foretel future things," then they are gods; if not, they are "vanity, and a work of naught, and "he is an abomination that chuſeth them," ver. 24. By "things to come," I underſtand ſuch effects as do not depend upon any neceſſary cauſe, but upon the will of free agents, and ſo may be, or may not be; from whence it is plain, that it is the prerogative of God, proper and peculiar to him, to know future events. And here I ſhall conſider theſe two things.

1. That God knows future events.

2. That

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2. That he only knows them.

1. God knows future events; which will appear from the dictates of natural light, and from ſcripture.

(1.) From the dictates of natural light, as it is a perfection, and that which among men is accounted the beſt part of wiſdom; and unleſs this did belong to God, how could he govern the world? The heathens, except only the Epicureans, generally granted this, as appears in thoſe wiſe counſels, which we frequently meet with in them to this purpoſe, that we ſhould not be anxious for the future; but having done our endeavour, leave the event of things to God, who only knows them and diſpoſeth them.

Permittes ipſis expendere numinibus, quid
Conveniat nobis, rebuſque ſit utile noſtris. Juv.

And afterward, ſaith he, "We are importunate "with God for wife and children:" *At illis notum, qui pueri, qualiſque futura ſit uxor.* And that this was their opinion, appears yet more clearly from thoſe apprehenſions which they had of divination. Tully lays down this for a principle, *deos poſſe nobis ſigna futurarum rerum oſtendere*; de legibus. And in his book de Divin. he tells us, "that there was ſuch "a thing as divination, for it was an old opinion," *jam uſque ab heroicis ducta temporibus, eaque Pop. Rom. & omnium gentium firmata conſenſu*, and afterward, that this divination was not, *ſine inſtinctu afflatúque divino.*

I know they did variouſly explain this, according to their ſeveral opinions about fate and contingency, and their apprehenſions about the providence of God. One ſect of them, the Stoicks, held that there was a fatal chain of cauſes from firſt to laſt, and things did neceſſarily follow one another; and by this means

they made fore-knowledge eaſy and explicable; and though in their diſputes they ſeem to grant no ſuch things as events and contingencies, yet they are agreed in the thing, that thoſe things which we call events, though they would not call them ſo, were fore-known to GOD. And for this I ſhall only cite one teſtimony of Seneca, ſpeaking of GOD's fore-knowledge of the moſt contingent things, the diſpoſitions of men long before they are born; he adds, *nota eſt enim illis operis ſui ſeries, omniúmque illis rerum per manus ſuas iturarum ſcientia in aperto ſemper eſt; nobis ex abdito ſubit; & quæ repentina putamus, illis proviſa veniunt & familiaria*; and how peremptory ſoever this ſect is in their diſputes about fate, yet when they ſpeak of the τὰ ἐφ' ἡμῖν, and generally in their moral diſcourſes, they ſeem plainly to me to exempt the will of man from this fatal neceſſity. SERM. CXXXIV.

And thoſe other ſects of the philoſophers that denied fate, did generally grant "GOD's fore-know-"ledge of contingent things." I grant indeed, that they did rather make GOD's fore-knowledge an arbitrary and voluntary, than a neceſſary perfection, that is, that GOD, when he pleaſed to apply himſelf to it, could fore-know all future events: but their general opinion was, that as his providence did not extend to ſmall and inconſiderable things, ſo neither his fore-knowledge. But Tully ſeems to attribute a very perfect providence to him, and a fore-knowledge of the leaſt things, *Quis non timeat omnia providentem, cogitantem, animadvertentem, & omnia ad ſe pertinere putantem, curioſum & negotii plenum Deum?* But I cannot ſay he is conſtant to himſelf: but they all agree in granting to him this perfection of knowing all future things, if he pleaſed to trouble

SERM. CXXXIV. himſelf with it; and had they not in this miſtaken the nature of God, they might eaſily have apprehended, that it is no trouble nor wearineſs to an infinite underſtanding, that is always in act, to know the leaſt things how many ſoever they be.

2. From ſcripture, which gives us teſtimonies and arguments of it.

(1.) Teſtimonies, Iſa. xlviii. 3, &c. Acts xv. 18. "Known unto God are all his works, from the "beginning of the world, ἀπ' αἰῶνος from everlaſt-"ing:" which by the way I cannot but compare with the forecited place of Seneca. *Nota enim illis operis ſui ſeries*, &c.

(2.) By arguments from ſcripture. I will mention but one; the clear and particular predictions of future events long before they happened: Gen. xv. 13. God foretells the children of Iſrael's deliverance after 430 years, which he punctually accompliſhed, Exod. xii. 40, 41. The prophet that propheſied againſt the altar at Bethel named the man that ſhould do it, Joſias, 350 years before-hand, 1 Kings xiii. 2. The deliverance of the children of Iſrael from the Babyloniſh captivity was foretold 100 years before to be done particularly by Cyrus; which is ſo ſtrange, that the prophet brings it in with a preface of God's wiſdom and power, Iſa. xliv. 24, &c. Which was afterward preciſely fulfilled, when the 70 years were expired. How are the life and death of the Meſſias, with many particular circumſtances foretold! And did not he foretell the deſtruction of Jeruſalem 40 years before?

But becauſe there may be no contingency in good things, God himſelf may be reſolved to effect them, or excite men to do them, when he hath foretold them; you ſhall find that the worſt things have been fore-

foretold; the apoſtacy of the children of Iſrael, Deut. xxxi. 16. and their infidelity in times of the goſpel, Iſa. liii. 1, 5, 9, 26. Our SAVIOUR foretold the treachery of Judas and Peter's denial of him: now theſe are ſo evil, that it were blaſphemy to ſuppoſe the holy GOD to have any hand in them; and therefore are foretold by him merely by virtue of his fore-knowledge, and the infiniteneſs of his underſtanding, which reacheth things at the greateſt diſtance, that are moſt contingent. SERM. CXXXIV.

SERMON CXXXV.

Of the knowledge of GOD.

1 SAM. ii. 3.

The LORD *is a* GOD *of knowledge.*

I Have conſidered this perfection of GOD, in ſome of the greateſt and moſt difficult inſtances of it, his knowledge of the moſt ſecret things, the hearts of men, and future events; againſt the laſt of which there are ſome objections, which I come now briefly to conſider, and paſs on to what remains. SERM. CXXXV.

Objection the firſt; the impoſſibility of the thing. The certainty of all knowledge depends upon the certainty of the object; therefore there cannot be a certain and determinate knowledge of any thing, but what is certainly and determinately true: but future events, which may, or may not be, have no certain and determinate truth, that is, it is not certain either that they will, or will not be, becauſe they have no

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certain cauſe; therefore there can be no infallible knowledge concerning them.

Anſwer. This I confeſs is the grand difficulty; I ſhall not be ſo ſolicitous to take it away, as to give ſatisfaction to it.

1. I might ſay, with a very fair probability, that the certainty of knowledge doth not depend upon the uncertainty of the cauſe, but of the object, which may be certain, though the cauſe be contingent. Which I prove thus: whatever event hath actually happened, as becauſe now it is paſt, it is certainly true, that it was; ſo becauſe it once was, it was certainly true before it was, that it would be; as in Peter's denying of CHRIST. If it be now true, that he hath denied him, it was true before, that he would deny him; and it being determinately true, GOD ſaw it as it was; ſo that here is an object of a certain knowledge.

2. Though we could not explain the poſſibility of GOD's knowing future contingencies, much leſs the manner how; yet we are ſufficiently aſſured that GOD doth know them. I will give but one inſtance for the proof of this. Nothing more evident than the ſin of Adam; yet GOD foreknew this, how elſe was CHRIST "decreed before the foundation of the "world?" CHRIST was a remedy upon the occaſion of ſin; now the remedy could not be deſigned before the ſin was foreſeen: and this being certain, *cum conſtat de re, fruſtra inquiritur de modo*, "when "we are certain of the thing, 'tis not neceſſary to "know the manner." We are ſatisfied of many things, the manner whereof we do not know; we believe the union of the ſoul and body, though no man can explain how a ſpirit can be united to matter; we believe the continuity of matter, that is, that the

the parts of it hang together, of which whoſoever ſaith he can give an account, doth but betray his own ignorance. And ſo in many other things; that man doth not know himſelf, nor the meaſure of his own underſtanding, nor the nature and obſcurity of things, that will not confeſs himſelf poſed in many things, that doth not acknowledge that there are many ἀφάνλασα, many things, the manner whereof is unimaginable, and of which our beſt reaſon and underſtanding can give no account. SERM. CXXXV.

3. 'Tis very unreaſonable to expect we ſhould know all the ways which infinite knowledge hath of knowing things. We have but finite faculties and meaſures, which bear no proportion to infinite powers and objects. Could we explain the manner how infinite knowledge knows things, we ſhould be like God in knowledge, our underſtanding would be infinite like his; and in this caſe eſpecially it becomes us to put on the modeſty of creatures, and to remember that we are finite and limited. Some arrogant ſpirits take it for an affront to their underſtandings, that any one ſhould expect they ſhould believe any thing, though they have the higheſt aſſurance of it, if they cannot explain the particular manner of it; they make nothing to deny God's knowledge of future events, unleſs they may be ſatisfied of the particular way how he knows them.

I know there are thoſe who undertake to explain the particular manner. Some ſay, that God ſees future events *in ſpeculo voluntatis*; others ſay, that the eternity of God is actually commenſurate to all duration, as his immenſity to all ſpace, and ſo God doth not ſo properly foreſee and foreknow, as ſee and know future things by the preſentiality and coexiſtence of all things in all eternity; for they ſay,

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that future things are actually preſent and exiſting to GOD, though not in *menſurâ propriâ*, yet in *menſurâ alienâ*: the ſchool-men have much more of this jargon and canting language; and I envy no man the underſtanding theſe phraſes; but to me they ſeem to ſignify nothing, but to have been words invented by idle and conceited men, which a great many ever ſince, leſt they ſhould ſeem to be ignorant, would ſeem to underſtand; but I wonder moſt, that men, when they have amuſed and puzzled themſelves and others with hard words, ſhould call this explaining things.

The ſum of the anſwer is this; that when we have done all we can, GOD's fore-knowledge of future events may ſeem contradictious and impoſſible to us, much leſs do I expect ever to be able to give a particular account of the manner of it: but we have ſufficient aſſurance of the thing, and unleſs we had infinite underſtandings, it were vanity to pretend to explain all the ways of infinite knowledge.

Secondly, It is objected, that if we can admit ſuch a knowledge in GOD as ſeems contradictious and impoſſible to our reaſon, why may we not allow and frame ſuch notions of his goodneſs and juſtice?

To this I anſwer, there is a great difference between thoſe perfections of GOD which are imitable, and thoſe which are not. Knowledge of future events is a perfection wherein we are not bound to be like GOD; and if we are aſſured of the thing, that he doth know them, it is not neceſſary that we ſhould know the manner of it, and diſentangle it from contradiction and impoſſibility: but it is otherwiſe in GOD's goodneſs and juſtice, which are imitable: he that imitates, endeavours to be like ſomething that he knows, and we muſt have a clear idea and

notion of that which we would bring ourſelves to the likeneſs of; theſe perfections of God we are capable of knowing, and therefore the knowledge of theſe perfections is chiefly recommended to us in ſcripture, Jer. ix. 24. By theſe God reveals himſelf, and declares his name, and makes himſelf known to us, even by thoſe attributes which declare his goodneſs, and mercy, and juſtice, Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7. Pſal. lxxxvi. 15. Deut. xxxii. 3, 4, 5. When God would give a deſcription of himſelf to Moſes, he promiſes "to "cauſe his goodneſs to paſs before him." So that it doth not follow, that becauſe God's knowledge of future events is to be admitted, notwithſtanding the ſeeming contradiction and impoſſibility of it, therefore we are to admit of any notion of God's juſtice or goodneſs that ſeems contradictious or impoſſible. The SERM. CXXXV.

Third objection is made up of ſeveral inconveniencies that would follow from God's knowledge of future events.

1. It would prejudice the liberty of the creature. For if God have an infallible knowledge of what we will do, then we cannot but do what he infallibly foreſees we will do; for otherwiſe his knowledge would be fallible.

Anſwer. God's fore-knowledge lays no neceſſity upon the event: in every event we may conſider the effect in itſelf, or with relation to the cauſe, and the manner how it comes to paſs; conſidered in itſelf, it is future, with relation to its cauſes, it is contingent. God ſees it as both, and ſo, as that which until it is, may be, or not be; and when it comes to paſs, he ſees the man do it freely; and ſo before it be done, it hath no neceſſity; but upon ſuppoſition of fore-ſight; as when it is, it hath upon ſup-

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poſition that it is, as Origen excellently explains it. Fore-knowledge is not the cauſe of the things that are fore-known; but becauſe the thing is future and ſhall be, this is the reaſon why it is fore-known; for it doth not, becauſe it was known, come to paſs; but becauſe it was to come to paſs, therefore it was fore-known; and bare-knowledge is no more the cauſe of any event, which becauſe it is known muſt infallibly be, than my ſeeing a man run, is the cauſe of his running, which, becauſe I do ſee, is infallibly ſo.

2dly. If God infallibly fore-knows what men will do, how can he be ſerious in his exhortations to repentance, in his expectation of it, and his grieving for the impenitency of men?

Anſwer. All theſe are founded in the liberty of our actions. God exhorts to repentance, and expects it, becauſe, by his grace, we may do it: he is ſaid to grieve for our impenitency, becauſe we may do otherwiſe, and will not. Exhortations are not in vain themſelves, but very proper to their end; though, through our obſtinacy and hardneſs, they may be rendered vain to us, and without effect. If the weight of the objection lies upon ſerious, and you aſk how God can exhort men ſeriouſly to that which he foreſees that they will not do; thoſe whom he fore-knows will be finally impenitent? I anſwer, if his exhortations were not ſerious, he could not foreſee the final impenitency of men. To foreſee mens final impenitency, is to foreſee their wilful contempt of God's warnings and exhortations, and rejection of his grace: now mens wilful contempt of his warnings and exhortations cannot be foreſeen, unleſs God foreſee that his exhortations are ſerious, and in good earneſt.

Having

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Having anſwered the objections againſt GOD's fore-knowing future events, I proceed to ſhew

II. That GOD only knows future events. Iſa. xliv. 6, 7. "Thus ſaith the LORD the king of Iſrael, and "his redeemer the LORD of hoſts, I am the firſt, "and I am the laſt, and beſides me there is no GOD: "and who, as I, ſhall call, and ſhall declare it, "and ſet it in order for me, ſince I appointed the "ancient people? and the things that are coming, "and ſhall come; let them ſhew unto them." Iſa. xlvi. 9, 10. "Remember the former things of old, "for I am GOD, and there is none elſe; I am GOD "and there is none like me. Declaring the end from "the beginning, and from ancient times the things "that are not yet done, ſaying, My counſel ſhall "ſtand, and I will do all my pleaſure."

The reaſon is evident, becauſe the knowledge of future events is beyond the reach of any finite underſtanding; eſpecially if we grant it to be beyond our finite underſtanding, to explain the poſſibility of ſuch a knowledge; for, to be ſure, that is out of the reach of our knowledge, which we cannot ſo much as underſtand how it is poſſible it ſhould be known by any underſtanding.

But it may here be objected; did not the oracles among the heathens foretel ſeveral things, which Chriſtians are ſatisfied came from the devil? I have not time at preſent to examine the buſineſs of heathen oracles; I could eaſily ſhew there was much impoſture in them: but grant they were really delivered and given out by a ſpirit; yet the darkneſs and ambiguity, the affected and contrived ambiguity, is ſuch, as ſhews that the devil was conſcious to himſelf of the uncertainty of his knowledge in thoſe matters: and thoſe few that came to paſs, and are in any

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any tolerable ſenſe ſaid to be accompliſhed, were in ſuch matters, either wherein prudent conjecture might go far (and I grant the devil to be a ſagacious ſpirit) or elſe in diſjunctive caſes, as when there are but two ways for a thing to be, it muſt either be ſo, or ſo, in which a bold gueſſing may often hit right: but gueſſing at future things, is far from a knowledge of them, which only can clearly be made out by punctual and particular predictions of things, with circumſtances of time and perſon, ſuch as we find in ſcripture in many inſtances, to the prediction of which, the greateſt ſagacity, and the utmoſt gueſſing could do nothing, ſuch as thoſe predictions of which I gave inſtances out of ſcripture.

I have now done with the firſt general head I propoſed to be ſpoken to from theſe words, viz. To prove that this attribute of knowledge belongs to God. I proceed to the

Second, viz. To conſider the perfection and prerogative of the divine knowledge; which I ſhall ſpeak to in theſe following particulars.

1. God's knowledge is preſent and actual, his eye is always open, and every thing is in the view of it. The knowledge of the creature is more power than act; it is not much that we are capable of knowing, but there is very little that we actually know: it is but one thing that we can fix our thoughts upon at once, and apply our minds to; we can remove them to another object, but then we muſt take off our minds from the former, and quit the actual knowledge of it: but the knowledge of God is an actual and ſteady comprehenſion of things; he being every where preſent, and all eye, nothing can eſcape his ſight, but all the objects are at once in the view of the divine underſtanding. Heb. iv. 13. "Neither

"is

" is there any creature that is not manifeſt in his SERM.
" ſight: but all things are naked and open unto the CXXXV.
" eyes of him with whom we have to do."

2. GOD's knowledge is an intimate and thorough knowledge, whereby he knows the very nature and eſſence of things. The knowledge which we have of things is but in part, but outward and ſuperficial; our knowledge glides upon the ſuperficies of things, but doth not penetrate into the intimate nature of them, it ſeldom reacheth further than the ſkin and outward appearance of things; we do not know things in their realities, but as they appear and are repreſented to us with all their maſks and diſguiſes: but GOD knows things as they are. 1 Sam. xvi. 7. " The LORD ſeeth not as man ſeeth; for man " looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD " looketh on the heart:" GOD knows things throughout, all that can be known of them. The quick and piercing eye of GOD penetrates into every thing, the light of the divine underſtanding lays all things " open and naked," Heb. iv. 13. In which expreſſion the apoſtle alludes to the ſacrifices of beaſts, which were ſlead, and cleft down the back bone, that the prieſt might look into them, and ſee whether they were without blemiſh. To the eye of our underſtandings moſt objects are cloſe, and have their ſkins upon them; but to the eyes of GOD all things are uncovered and diſſected, and lie open to his view.

3. GOD's knowledge is clear and diſtinct. Our underſtandings in the knowledge of things are liable to great confuſion; we are often deceived with the near likeneſs and reſemblance of things, and miſtake one thing for another; our knowledge is but a twilight, which doth not ſufficiently ſeparate and diſtinguiſh

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diſtinguiſh things from one another; we ſee things many times together, and in an heap, and do but know them in groſs: but there is no confuſion in the divine underſtanding; that is a clear light which ſeparates and diſtinguiſhes things of the greateſt nearneſs and reſemblance; GOD hath a particular knowledge of the leaſt things, Luke xii. 7. "even "the very hairs of your head are all numbered;" thoſe things which are of the leaſt conſideration, and have the greateſt likeneſs to one another; "the very "hairs of your head" are ſeverally and diſtinctly known to GOD.

4. GOD's knowledge is certain and infallible. We are ſubject to doubt and error in our underſtanding of things; every thing almoſt impoſeth upon our underſtandings, and tinctures our minds, and makes us look on things otherwiſe than they are; our temper and complexion, our education and prejudice, our intereſt and advantage, our humours and diſtempers; theſe all miſrepreſent things, and darken our minds, and ſeduce our judgment, and betray us to error and miſtake: but the divine underſtanding is a clear, fixed, conſtant, and undiſturbed light, a pure mirror that receives no ſtain from affection, or intereſt, or any other thing. Men are many times confident and apt to impoſe upon others, as if they were infallible; but this is the prerogative of GOD, the privilege of the divine underſtanding, that it is ſecure from all poſſibility of error; it is GOD only "that cannot lie," Tit. i. 2. becauſe he cannot be deceived; the infallibility of GOD is the foundation of his veracity.

5. The knowledge of GOD is eaſy, and without difficulty. We muſt dig deep for knowledge, take a great deal of pains to know a little; we do not

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ıe knowledge of things without ſearch and ınd great intention of mind; we ſtrive to ıend ſome things, but they are ſo vaſt that ıot: other things are at ſuch a diſtance, that erſtanding is too weak to diſcern them; other are ſo little, and ſmall, and nice, that our ınding cannot lay hold of them, we cannot our minds to ſuch a point as to faſten upon but the underſtanding of God being infinite, nothing at a diſtance from it, nothing too ıd vaſt for its comprehenſion; nor is there ıg ſo little that it can eſcape his knowledge nadverſion. The great wiſdom of Solomon ared to "the ſand on the ſea ſhore;" the vaſt, but the ſands are little (ſaith one) to that the vaſt mind of Solomon did compre- e leaſt things. It is much more true of is underſtanding is a vaſt comprehenſion of things, as well as the greateſt: and all this es without difficulty or pain; he knows all without ſtudy, and his underſtanding is in il exerciſe without wearineſs. How many ire there which we cannot find out without without looking narrowly into, and bending ids to underſtand them? But all things are to God, and lie open to his view.

ſaid indeed in ſcripture "to ſearch the heart" o try the reins" and "to weigh the ſpirits;" ſe expreſſions do not ſignify the painfulneſs.

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our ignorance is greater than our knowledge, *ultima pars eorum quæ ſcimus, eſt minima pars eorum quæ neſcimus:* but the divine underſtanding is vaſt and comprehenſive, and by an imperious view commands all objects; "he is greater than our hearts, and "knoweth all things;" he knows himſelf, and the excellency and perfection of his own nature, and the ſecrets of his will, 1 Cor. ii. 11. "The ſpirit of "GOD ſearcheth the deep things of GOD;" he knows all other things that are not, and all things that are, in all differences of time, their powers and qualities. The knowledge of GOD is infinite; Pſal. cxlvii. 5. "His underſtandinging is infinite:" he knows himſelf, and his own perfections, and all the poſſibilities of things, which are all infinite. Now the underſtanding of GOD being infinite is incapable of any addition, or diminution, or change. Our finite underſtandings are liable to alteration; they may grow or decline: but the knowledge of GOD is a full, conſtant light, it is always the ſame, not liable to any eclipſe, nor capable of any exaltation or improvement, but remains for ever the ſame.

Thirdly, I come now to draw ſome inferences from the ſeveral parts of this diſcourſe.

I. From the perfection of GOD's knowledge.

1. The perfection of the divine knowledge calls for our veneration. Every excellency commands reverence, and raiſeth our admiration, and none more than knowledge: there is nothing that we value ourſelves or others more by, than this: the higheſt knowledge of man, the moſt glorious underſtanding, that ever any one of the ſons of men were endowed with, is, compared to the knowledge of GOD, but "as a glow-worm to the ſun." If we admire theſe "Candles of the LORD," which ſhine

ſo

ſo imperfectly in the dark; if we reverence a little knowledge, compaſſed about with ignorance; how ſhall we admire "the Father of lights, in whom is "no darkneſs at all," that knowledge which hath nothing of blemiſh or imperfection in it! SERM. CXXXV.

We may hence learn humility, and that on this double account, as we have all our knowledge from him; "what have we that we have not received?" and as our knowledge is very imperfect, when compared with the divine underſtanding. We are blind and ignorant; it is but a few things that we are capable of knowing; and we know but a few of thoſe things which our natures are capable of knowing; and of thoſe things we do know, our knowledge is very imperfect, it is ſlight and ſuperficial, attended with much difficulty and uncertainty in the attaining of it, and error and confuſion in the uſe of it; the cleareſt reaſon, and the brighteſt underſtanding of man hath many flaws, and defects in it; ſo that the more we know of GOD, and of ourſelves, the more humble we ſhall be. It is "an empty knowledge, "and falſely ſo called" that "puffs up;" as the empty ears of corn are pert, and raiſe up themſelves; but thoſe which are big and full, droop and hang down their heads: ſo it is only ignorance that is proud, and lifts men up, but true knowledge makes men humble.

3. This is matter of comfort and encouragement. He knows our wants and weakneſs, and "will lay "no more upon us than we are able to bear; for "he conſiders that we are but duſt:" he knows the rage and malice of our enemies, and can, when he pleaſes, "put a hook in their noſe," and "his bri-"dle in their lips," as he did to Senacherib, 2 Kings xix. 28.

1. From

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1. From GOD's knowing our ſecret actions, I infer,

1. If GOD ſees our moſt ſecret actions, this diſcovers and confutes the ſecret atheiſm of many. He that commits the moſt ſecret ſin denies the omniſcience of GOD. Thus David deſcribes the atheiſm of ſome in his days: "he hath ſaid in his heart, GOD "hath forgot; he hideth his face, he will never ſee "it: the LORD ſhall not ſee, neither ſhall the GOD "of Jacob regard it." And is not this, in effect, to deny GOD's being? for it is to deny him to be what he is. A man may as well deny there is a ſun, as deny that it ſhines and enlightens the world.

There are ſome relicks of this even in the beſt men, which do at ſome times diſcover themſelves, Pſal. lxxiii. 10, 11. "Therefore his people return "hither; and waters of a full cup are wrung out "to them:" and they ſay, "how doth GOD know? "is there knowledge in the moſt High?" that is, the people of GOD come to this, when they are come to an afflicted ſtate, and ſee the proſperity of wicked men; they come to this, to queſtion the providence of GOD, whether he takes knowledge of the affairs of the world. But this atheiſm reigns in wicked men; while they live in their ſins, they live in the denial of GOD's omniſcience: for did men really believe that "GOD ſees in ſecret," that his eye perceiveth the darkneſs, and lays open and naked all things before it, how durſt they lie, and ſteal, and ſwear falſely? Vain man! why doſt thou ſeek darkneſs and retirement? How art thou alone, if thou believeſt that GOD is every where? How canſt thou retire from him; how canſt thou ſhut him out? If thou believeſt that he is the light, what ſecurity is darkneſs to thee? If he look upon thee, who is the greateſt

greateſt and beſt perſon in the world, who is thy ſovereign, thy judge, thy father, and thy maſter, and thy beſt friend (for we uſe to reverence perſons under theſe notions and relations, and to be aſhamed to do any thing that is vile and unſeemly before them) if he, who is all this, look upon thee, why art thou not aſhamed? why does not thy blood riſe in thy face? Why ſhould not ſhame and fear work upon the apprehenſion of God's ſeeing us, as if men did behold us? For this, that God ſees thee, is a greater ſurprize and diſcovery, and threatens thee with more danger, than if the whole world ſtood by thee. SERM. CXXXV.

2. Live as thoſe that believe this; be continually under the power of this apprehenſion, that God takes a particular and exact notice of all thy actions. The firm belief of this, would have a double influence upon us, it would encourage us in well-doing, and be a reſtraint upon us as to ſin; *ſic vivamus tanquem in conſpectu vivamus.* Seneca. It were well if men would live as if any body ſaw them; but to live as if ſome worthy and excellent perſon were always preſent with us, and did obſerve us, this will be a far greater curb upon us. There are ſome ſins of that uglineſs and deformity, that a man would not commit them in the preſence of any one, of a child, or a fool; and there are ſome perſons of ſuch worth and reverence, *quorum interventu perditi quoque homines vitia ſupprimerent. Epicurus* had this good conceit of himſelf, that he could adviſe others ſo to act as if he ſtood by, *fac omnia tanquam ſpectet Epicurus*; but Seneca inſtanceth much better in Cato, or Scipio, or Lælius,

Ut ſic tanquam illo ſpectante vivamus.

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and ſhall not the preſence of the divine majeſty be an eternal reſtraint upon us?

This was David's courſe to keep himſelf from ſin, Pſal. xxxix. 1. "I will take heed to my ways, while "the wicked is before me;" how much more in the preſence of GOD? "I have kept thy precepts and "thy teſtimonies, for all my ways are before thee," Pſal. cxix. 168. And it was wiſely adviſed by Seneca, "that we ſhould ſo live when we are among "men, as believing GOD ſees us: and when there "is none but he ſees us, let us behave ourſelves be-"fore him, as if men did ſtare upon us."

III. GOD's knowledge of the heart teacheth us,

1. The folly of hypocriſy: how vain it is to make a ſhew of that outwardly, which inwardly and in our hearts we are not; to put on a maſk of religion, and paint ourſelves beautifully without, when "inward-"ly we are full of rottenneſs and uncleanneſs; to "honour GOD with our lips, when our hearts are "far from him." If we were to deal with men, this were not a very wiſe way, for there is danger of diſcovery even from them; therefore the beſt way for a man to ſeem to be any thing, is really to be what he would appear; but having to deal with GOD, who "knows our thoughts afar off," to whom all our diſguiſes are tranſparent, and all our little arts of concealment ſignify nothing, it is a madneſs to hide our iniquity in our boſom. With this argument our SAVIOUR convinceth the hypocritical Phariſees, Luke xvi. 15. "Ye are they that juſtify yourſelves before "men; but God knoweth your hearts."

2. If GOD know your hearts, then endeavour to approve your hearts to him; charge yourſelves with inward purity and holineſs, becauſe of the pure eyes which behold the moſt intimate and ſecret motions of

of your ſouls; therefore "cleanſe your hearts from "wickedneſs: how long ſhall vain thoughts lodge "within you?" Fear and ſhame from men lay a great reſtraint upon our outward actions; but how licentious are we many times in our hearts? What a ſtrange freedom do we take within our own breaſts? This is an argument of the ſecret atheiſm that lies at the bottom of our hearts. He that allows himſelf in any wicked thoughts and imaginations, which (out of regard to men) he will not put in practice, this man plainly declares, that he reverenceth men more than GOD; that he either diſbelieves a GOD or deſpiſeth him. SERM. CXXXV.

Therefore "keep your hearts with all diligence," becauſe they are peculiarly under GOD's inſpection; and when you are ready to take the liberty of your thoughts, becauſe no eye ſees you, aſk yourſelves, "Doth not he that pondereth the heart conſider it? "And he that keepeth thy ſoul, doth he not know "it?" as the wiſe man ſpeaks, Prov. xxiv. 12.

And whatever you do in the ſervice of GOD "do "it heartily as to the LORD." Indeed, if we did only worſhip GOD, "to be ſeen of men," an external worſhip would be ſufficient: but religion is not intended to pleaſe men, but GOD; he is a ſpirit, and ſees our ſpirits, therefore we muſt "worſhip him "in ſpirit and in truth." 1 Theſſ. ii. 4. Not "as pleaſing men, but GOD, who trieth our "hearts." David uſeth this argument to his ſon Solomon, 1 Chron. xxviii. 9. "And thou, Solomon, "my ſon, know thou the GOD of thy father, and "ſerve him with a perfect heart, and with a willing "mind; for the LORD ſearcheth all hearts, and un-"derſtandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts." Whatever liberty we may take to ourſelves now, and

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how careleſs ſoever we are of our thoughts, and the inward frame of our hearts, yet the ſcripture aſſures us, that he, who knows our hearts, will one day judge us according to them. Jer. xvii. 10. "I the "LORD ſearch the heart, I try the reins, even to "give every man according to his ways." And the apoſtle ſpeaks of "a day coming wherein GOD "will judge the ſecrets of men by JESUS CHRIST," Heb. iv. 13. Rev. ii. 23.

This is matter of encouragement to us in many caſes: in our ſecret troubles, Pſal. cxlii. 3. "When "my ſpirit was overwhelmed within me, then thou "kneweſt my path." In caſes of difficulty which depend upon the hearts of other men; which though we do not know, yet GOD knows them: So the apoſtles, Acts i. 24. when they did not know whom to chuſe for an apoſtle, they refer it to GOD; and "they prayed and ſaid, Thou, LORD, which know-"eſt the hearts of all, ſhew whether of theſe two "thou haſt choſen." But eſpecially this is matter of comfort to us, when we ſuffer by the calumnies and reproaches of men, when the world chargeth us with crimes of hypocriſy, and falſeneſs, and inſincerity; then to be able to appeal to "the ſearcher of "hearts," as to our innocency and ſincerity, and to ſay with the prophet Jeremiah, "O LORD of hoſts, "that trieth the righteous, and ſeeſt the reins and the "heart, unto thee have I opened my cauſe," ch. xx. 12. and with St. Peter, "GOD which know-"eth the hearts, bare them witneſs," Acts xv. 8.

4. This renders all the deep and profound policies of wicked men a vain thing. "The LORD knows "the thoughts of men, that they are vanity," Pſal. xciv. 11. They are vanity, becauſe he knows them, and can defeat them; he can "bring their counſels "to

" to nought, and make their devices of none effect." He is conſcious to the firſt motions of their hearts; he ſees thoſe cobwebs which they are ſpinning, and can blow them away with a breath; he can ſnare them in their own policies, and turn " their counſels " into fooliſhneſs." Thou that putteſt a maſk upon a wicked deſign, and hideſt the malice and revenge of thine heart under a diſſembling countenance, GOD ſees thy deſign, and hath a thouſand ways to prevent it. When the politicians of the world think they have laid their deſign with all imaginable caution, and that their counſels cannot miſcarry, being out of all poſſibility of human diſcovery or prevention; for all this " their counſels may come to " nought," and though " they have reſolved it," yet it may " not ſtand; he that ſets in the heavens " laughs at them, the LORD hath them in deriſion." As wiſe as they are, they are guilty of this overſight, that they did not take GOD into conſideration, by whom they are ſurprized and diſcovered. He that ſees their deſign, can blaſt it in a moment; he " can ſpeak the word," and " thy breath ſhall go " forth, and thou ſhalt return to thy duſt, and in " that very day thy thoughts periſh," Pſal. cxlvi. 4. SERM. CXXXV.

5. If GOD only knows the hearts of men, then " what art thou, O man, that judgeſt another's " heart?" This condemns the uncharitableneſs of men, who take upon them to judge and cenſure mens hearts, which is, " to ſpeak evil of the things which " they know not;" to meddle with things which do not fall under their cognizance. What St. James ſaith, ch. iv. 12. " There is one law-giver, that is " able to ſave, and to deſtroy; who art thou that " judgeſt another?" is proportionably true in this caſe; there is but " one that knows the heart; who

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" art thou then that judgeſt another man's heart?" Who art thou, O man! that takeſt upon thee to ſit in judgment upon thy brother, and to paſs ſentence upon his heart, to pronounce him a hypocrite, a wicked man, and a damned wretch? Art thou a man, and the ſon of man, and wilt thou aſſume to thyſelf the prerogative of GOD? Man can only look to the outward appearance; but " GOD ſeeth the heart."

There's nothing doth more palpably diſcover the unchriſtian ſpirit of that new ſect which is of late riſen up amongſt us, than their taking upon them to judge mens hearts, and as confidently to cenſure every man they meet, as if they had a window into his breaſt: but they are not alone guilty of this; thoſe who are ſo ready to call men hypocrites, they invade this prerogative of GOD. We may pronounce an action wicked, if it be contrary to the rule; or a man wicked, as to his preſent ſtate, if the general courſe of his life and actions be wicked; for our SAVIOUR tells us, " by their fruits ye ſhall " know them." This we may do, provided we be called to it, and be ſure it is ſo: but to call any man an hypocrite, who makes an outward profeſſion of religion, and whoſe external converſation is unblameable; this is to judge a man in a matter of which thou canſt have no evidence; this is " to aſ- " cend into heaven," and ſtep into " the throne of " GOD, and to be like the moſt High;" for " he, " even he only, knows the hearts of the children " of men."

IV. From GOD's knowledge of future events, we may learn,

1. The vanity of aſtrology, and all other arts that pretend to foretel future events, things that depend on the will of free agents. The vanity of theſe

arts

arts hath been ſufficiently ſhewn by learned men, SERM. from the weakneſs and uncertainty of the principles CXXXV. they rely upon; I ſhall only for the preſent take notice, that it contradicts this principle of religion, that "GOD only knows future events." From prudent collections and obſervations, probable conjectures may be made of what will happen in ſome caſes; but there are no certain perſpective-glaſſes, with which we can ſee future events, but divine revelation; therefore whoever takes upon him to foretel future events without divine revelation, he arrogates to himſelf that which is the prerogative of the Deity; and GOD delights to chaſtiſe the curioſity, and croſs the predictions of theſe vain pretenders: Iſa. xliv. 24, 25. "Thus ſaith the LORD that "formed thee, I am the LORD that maketh all "things, that ſtretcheth forth the heavens alone, "that ſpreadeth abroad the earth by myſelf: that "fruſtrateth the tokens of the liars, and maketh "diviners mad; that turneth wiſe men backward, "and maketh their knowledge fooliſh." As he alſo in ſcripture threatens thoſe who conſult them, and rely upon them. Thoſe who go to aſtrologers, or wiſe men, as they call them, to know their fortunes, and enquire of the events of their life, they "forſake GOD," and "betake themſelves to lying "vanities."

2. Refer future things to GOD, who only knows them; truſt him with all events; "caſt your care "upon him." When you have uſed your beſt prudence, and wiſdom, and diligence, for your ſupply and ſecurity for the future, leave the reſt to GOD, "for your heavenly father knoweth" both your wants and your dangers. When we are over ſolicitous about future things, we take GOD's proper

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work out of his hands, and uſurp the government of the world. Why do we "take too much upon us? "We are but of yeſterday," and "know not what "will be to-morrow."

Mind your preſent duty and work, and leave events to GOD. "Secret things belong to the "LORD our GOD; but thoſe things that are re- "vealed to us, and our children for ever, to do all "the words of his law," Deut. xxix. 29. Do your duty, "commit the reſt to GOD in well doing."

In this world we are in a mix'd condition, which is made up of good and evil, of happineſs and miſery: what is good for us to know, is revealed, that is our duty; but in great wiſdom and pity to mankind, GOD hath concealed and hid the reſt from us. He hath hid from us the good that may happen to us, becauſe the beſt things of this world are but ſhallow and empty, and if we would ſee them before-hand, we ſhould prevent ourſelves in the enjoyment of them, and eat out the ſweetneſs which is in them by delightful fore-thoughts of them: and he hath concealed future evils from us, leſt we ſhould torment ourſelves with the fearful expectation of them.

Prudens, futuri temporis exitum,
Caliginoſâ nocte premit Deus.
Ridetque, ſi mortalis ultra fas trepidat.

What a folly is it to make yourſelves miſerable with fear of being ſo; *ante miſerias miſer.* Uſe all wiſe means to prevent what you fear, and then be ſatisfied, and be as happy as you can till miſery come, go not forth to meet it, "ſufficient for the day is the "evil thereof:" do not anticipate the evils of to-morrow, and take preſent poſſeſſion of an evil to come; "caſt your care upon him" who hath promiſed to "care for you."

SERMON CXXXVI.

The wiſdom, glory, and ſovereignty of GOD.

JUDE, ver. 25.

To the only wiſe GOD *our* SAVIOUR, *be glory and majeſty, dominion and power, now and ever.*

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I AM treating of the attributes of GOD, particularly of thoſe which relate to the divine underſtanding, his knowledge and wiſdom. The knowledge of GOD only implies his bare underſtanding of things; but his wiſdom implies the ſkill of ordering and diſpoſing things to the beſt ends and purpoſes, the ſkill of making and governing, and adminiſtring all things in number, weight and meaſure. The knowledge of GOD rather conſiders things abſolutely, and in themſelves: the wiſdom of GOD conſiders rather the reſpects and relations of things, looks upon things under the notion of means, and ends; accordingly I deſcribe them thus: the knowledge of GOD is a perfect comprehenſion of the nature of all things, with all their qualities, powers, and circumſtances. The wiſdom of GOD is a perfect comprehenſion of the reſpects and relations of things one to another; of their harmony and oppoſition, their fitneſs and unfitneſs to ſuch and ſuch ends. I have largely ſpoken to the firſt of theſe: I come now to the

Second, the wiſdom of GOD in general; together with his majeſty and ſovereignty, as they are here joined together. I begin with the

Firſt,

SERM. CXXXVI. First, that "God is the only wiſe God." In handling of this, I ſhall ſhew,

1. In what ſenſe God may be ſaid to be the "only wiſe God."

2. Prove that this attribute belongs to God.

1. In what ſenſe God may be ſaid to be "the "only wiſe God." For anſwer to this, we may take notice, that there are ſome perfections of God that are incommunicable to the creatures; as, his independency and eternity. Theſe God only poſſeſſeth, and they are to be attributed to him alone; God only is independent and eternal: but there are other perfections which are communicable, that is, which the creatures may, in ſome meaſure and degree, partake of, as knowledge, and wiſdom, and goodneſs, and juſtice, and power, and the like; yet theſe the ſcripture do peculiarly attribute to God; not that they are altogether incommunicable to the creature, but that they belong to God in ſuch a peculiar and divine manner, as doth ſhut out the creature from any claim or title to them, in that degree and perfection wherein God poſſeſſeth them. I ſhall give you ſome inſtances of this. His goodneſs, this is reſerved to God alone, Matth. xix. 17. "Why "calleſt thou me good? there is none good, but "one, that is God:" his power and immortality, 1 Tim. vi. 15, 16. "Who is the bleſſed and only "potentate; who only hath immortality:" his wiſdom, 1 Tim. i. 17. "The only wiſe God:" Rom. xvi. 27. "To God only wiſe be glory:" his holineſs, Rev. xv. 14. "For thou only art holy." The tranſcendent degree and ſingularity of theſe divine perfections which are communicable, is beyond what we are able to conceive: ſo that although the creatures partake of them, yet in that degree and perfection

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tion wherein GOD poſſeſſeth them, they are peculiar and proper to the Deity: ſo that, in this ſenſe, "there is none good but GOD:" he only is holy, he is the only wiſe: in ſo inconceivable a manner doth GOD poſſeſs even thoſe perfections, which in ſome degree he communicates; and we can only underſtand them as he communicates them, and not as he poſſeſſeth them; ſo that when we conſider any of theſe divine perfections, we muſt not frame notions of them contrary to what they are in the creature: but we muſt ſay, that the goodneſs and wiſdom of GOD are all this which is in the creature, and much more, which I am not able to comprehend.

This being premiſed in general, GOD may be ſaid to be only wiſe in theſe two reſpects.

1. As being originally and independently wiſe.
2. As being eminently and tranſcendently ſo.

1. GOD only is originally and independently wiſe. He derives it from none, and all derive it from him: Rom. xi. 33, 34. "O the depth of the riches "both of the wiſdom and knowledge of GOD! How "unſearchable are his judgments, and his ways "paſt finding out! For who hath known the mind "of the LORD, or who hath been his counſellor? "or who hath firſt given to him, and it ſhall be "recompenſed unto him again? For of him, and "through him, and to him are all things, to whom "be glory for ever. Amen." He challengeth any creature to come forth and ſay, that they have given wiſdom, or any other perfection, to GOD: no, all creatures that are partakers of it, derive it from him: Prov. ii. 6. "For the LORD giveth wiſdom." Eccl. ii. 26. "GOD giveth to a man that is good "in his ſight, wiſdom, and knowledge, and joy."

Dan.

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Dan. ii. 21. "He giveth wiſdom to the wiſe," and "knowledge to them that know underſtanding."

2. He is eminently and tranſcendently ſo: and this follows from the former, becauſe GOD is the fountain of wiſdom, therefore it is moſt eminently in him: Pſal. xciv. 9, 10. "He that planted the "ear, ſhall he not hear? he that formed the eye, "ſhall he not ſee? he that teacheth man knowledge, "ſhall not he know?" In like manner we may reaſon concerning all other attributes of GOD, that if he communicates them, he is much more eminently poſſeſt of them himſelf; the greateſt wiſdom of the creatures is nothing in oppoſition to the wiſdom of GOD, nothing in compariſon to it.

Nothing in oppoſition to it: Job v. 13. "He "taketh the wiſe in their own craftineſs." Job ix. 4. "He is wiſe in heart, and mighty in ſtrength: "who hath hardened himſelf againſt him, and proſ-"pered?" Prov. xxi. 30. "There is no wiſdom, "nor underſtanding, nor counſel, againſt the "LORD." 1 Cor. i. 19. "He will deſtroy the "wiſdom of the wiſe;" v. 29. and by "fooliſh "things confound the wiſe."

Nothing in compariſon of it. There are a great many that pretend to wiſdom; but moſt are deſtitute of true wiſdom; and thoſe who have it, have it with many imperfections and diſadvantages. Uſually thoſe who are deſtitute of true wiſdom, pretend moſt to it, Job xi. 12. "Vain man "would be wiſe, tho' he be born like a wild aſs's "colt." The high and the great of this world pretend to it: Job xxxii. 9. "Great men are not always "wiſe." Learned men, they pretend to it; the heathen philoſophers were great profeſſors of wiſdom, Rom. i. 22. "Profeſſing themſelves to be wiſe, they "became

" became fools," they were " wiſe to do evil, but " to do good they had no underſtanding :" As the prophet ſpeaks, Jeremiah iv. 22. The politicians of the world, they pretend to it; but theirs is rather a craftineſs than a wiſdom. Men call it prudence; but they are glad to uſe many arts to ſet it off, and make it look like wiſdom; by ſilence, and ſecrecy, and formality, and affected gravity, and nods, and geſtures. The ſcripture calls it " the wiſdom of this world," 1Cor. ii. 6. and a " fleſhly wiſdom," 2Cor. i. 12. It is wiſdom miſapplied, it is the purſuit of a wrong end. The petty plots and deſigns of this world are far from wiſdom: 1 Cor. iii. 20. " The LORD knoweth the " thoughts of the wiſe, that they are vain." That cannot be wiſdom, which miſtakes its great end, which minds mean things, and neglects thoſe which are of greateſt concernment to them: Job xxii. 2. " He that is wiſe, is profitable to himſelf." Prov. ix. 12. " If thou be wiſe, thou ſhalt be wiſe for thy " ſelf." Tully tells us, Ennius was wont to ſay, *Ne quicquam ſapere ſapientem, qui ſibi ipſi prodeſſe non quiret.* The wiſe ſages of the world, as to the beſt things are fools, Matt. xi. 25. " GOD hath hid theſe " things from the wiſe and prudent." There are many that are " wiſe in their own conceits; but there " is more hope of a fool than of them." Prov. xxvi. 12. So that the greateſt part of that which paſſeth for wiſdom among men, is quite another thing. *Nihil tam valde vulgare quàm nihil ſapere*; we talk much of prodigies, *maximum portentum vir ſapiens*, Tully. Thoſe few in the world that are " the children of true wiſdom," they have it in a very imperfect degree; they are not uſually ſo wiſe for their ſouls, and for eternity, as men of this world, Luke xvi. 8. " The children of this world are in " their

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" their generation wiſer than the children of light:" It is attended with many inconveniencies, Eccl. i. 18. " In much wiſdom there is much grief;" he ſpeaks of the wiſdom about natural things.

But we need not inſtance in the folly of wicked men, and worldly men, and in the imperfect degrees of wiſdom which are to be found in good men, in wiſdom's own children; the wiſdom of GOD needs not theſe foils to ſet it off: the wiſdom of man in innocency, or of the higheſt angel in heaven, bears no proportion to the unerring and infinite wiſdom of GOD. We mortal men many times miſtake our end out of ignorance, and apply unfit and improper means for accompliſhing good ends; the angels in glory have not a perfect comprehenſion of the harmony and agreement of things, of the unfitneſs and oppoſition of them one to another: but the divine wiſdom propounds to itſelf the higheſt and beſt ends, and hath a perfect comprehenſion of the fitneſs and unfitneſs of all things one to another: ſo that angels are but fooliſh beings to GOD. Job iv. 17. " His angels he chargeth with folly." Job, upon a full enquiry after wiſdom, concludes that it only belongs to GOD, that he only is perfectly poſſeſſed of it. Job xxviii. 12, &c. " But where ſhall " wiſdom be found? and where is the place of un- " derſtanding?" In ſuch an eminent and tranſcendent degree it is not to be met with in any of the creatures; GOD only hath it, ver. 23. " GOD know- " eth the place thereof."

II. I ſhall prove that this perfection belongs to GOD.

1. From the dictates of natural reaſon, and
2. From ſcripture.

1. From the dictates of natural reaſon. I have often

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often told you the perfections of GOD are not to be proved by way of demonſtration, becauſe there is no cauſe of them; but by way of conviction, by ſhewing the abſurdity and inconvenience of the contrary.

The contrary is an imperfection, and argues many other imperfections; therefore wiſdom belongs to GOD. Among men folly is looked upon as the greateſt defect; it is accounted a greater reproach and diſgrace, than vice and wickedneſs; it is of ſo ill a report in the world, that there are not many but had rather be accounted knaves than fools; but in a true eſteem and value of things, it is, next to wickedneſs, the greateſt imperfection; and, on the contrary, wiſdom is the higheſt perfection next to holineſs and goodneſs; it is uſually more cried up in the world than any thing elſe. Reaſon tells us, though the ſcripture had not ſaid it; that "wiſdom excels "folly as much as light doth darkneſs," Eccl. ii. 13. "The wiſdom of a man maketh his face to "ſhine," Eccl. viii. 1. "wiſdom is a defence," vii. 12. and ver. 19. "Wiſdom ſtrengtheneth the wiſe "more than ten mighty men that are in the city."

And the denial of this perfection to GOD would argue many other imperfections; it would be an univerſal blemiſh to the divine nature, and would darken all his other perfections. It would weaken the power of GOD. How impotent and ineffectual would power be without wiſdom! what irregular things would it produce! what untoward combinations of effects would there be, if infinite power ſhould act without the conduct and direction of infinite wiſdom! it would eclipſe the providence of GOD, and put out the eyes that are in the wheels, as the prophet repreſents GOD's providence. There can be no counſel, no fore-caſt, no orderly government of the world

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world without wiſdom. The goodneſs, and mercy, and juſtice, and truth of GOD, could not ſhine with that luſtre, were it not for his wiſdom, which doth illuſtrate theſe with ſo much advantage.

I need not bring teſtimonies from heathen writers to confirm this; their books are full of expreſſions of their admiration of GOD's wiſe government of the world. I need not trouble you with quotations of particular teſtimonies. Epicurus indeed denied that GOD either made or governed the world; but he muſt needs acknowledge him to have been a very wiſe being, becauſe he made him happy, which cannot be without wiſdom, though he had taken away all other evidence of his wiſdom. Ariſtotle ſeems to have ſuppoſed the world to be a neceſſary reſult and emanation from GOD: but then the other ſects of philoſophers did ſuppoſe the world to be the free product of GOD's goodneſs and wiſdom.

2. From ſcripture; Job ix. 4. "He is wiſe in "heart;" xxxvi. 5. "He is mighty in ſtrength "and wiſdom." Dan. ii. 20. "Bleſſed be the name "of GOD for ever and ever, for wiſdom and might "are his." Hither we may refer thoſe texts, which attribute wiſdom to GOD in a ſingular and peculiar manner, Rom. xvi. 27. and thoſe which ſpeak of GOD as the fountain of it, who communicates and beſtows it upon his creatures, Dan. ii. 21. James i. 5. and thoſe texts which ſpeak of the wiſdom of GOD in the creation of the world, Pſal. civ. 24. "O "LORD, how wonderful are thy works, in wiſdom "haſt thou made them all!" Jer. x. 12. "Who "hath eſtabliſhed the world by his wiſdom, and "ſtretched forth the heavens by his diſcretion:" in the providence and government of the world. Dan. ii. 20. "Wiſdom and ſtrength are his, and he "changeth

" changeth times and ſeaſons; he removeth kings, SERM.
" and ſetteth up kings:" and in many other places, CXXXVI.
in the redemption of mankind. Therefore CHRIST is called " the wiſdom of GOD," 1 Cor. i. 24. and the diſpenſation of the goſpel, " the hidden wiſdom " of GOD, and the manifold wiſdom of GOD," Eph. ii. 10.

If then GOD be only wiſe, the original and only fountain of it, from thence we learn,

Firſt, to go to him for it, Jam. i. 5. " If any man " lack wiſdom, let him aſk it of GOD." There are many conceited men, that think they are rich and increaſed, and ſtand in need of nothing. The apoſtle doth not ſpeak, as if there were ſome that did not want wiſdom, but becauſe there are ſome ſo proud and conceited, that they think they lack nothing; thoſe are ſtart fools, and GOD reſiſts ſuch fooliſh and proud men: but if any man, ſenſible of his defect and imperfection, cometh to GOD, " he " gives liberally, and upbraids no man." We are aſhamed to learn wiſdom of men, leſt they ſhould contemn and upbraid us with our folly: men are envious and unwilling that others ſhould be as wiſe as themſelves; but GOD's goodneſs makes him willing to impart wiſdom: " he gives liberally, and up- " braids no man."

This is the moſt deſirable accompliſhment and perfection; " happy is the man that getteth wiſdom; " wiſdom is the principal thing, therefore get wiſ- " dom:" it is better than thoſe things that are of the higheſt value among men, as Solomon often makes the compariſon. Now becauſe " it comes " down from above," we ſhould look up for it; it is by the revelation of his will, and the wiſe counſels of his word, that we are made " wiſe unto ſalvati-

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" on;" therefore we ſhould beg of him, that " he " would give us the ſpirit of wiſdom and revelation " in the knowledge of himſelf," Eph. i. 17.

2. If GOD be only wiſe in ſuch an eminent and tranſcendent degree, then let us be humble. There is no cauſe of boaſting, ſeeing " we have nothing " but what we have received." The loweſt inſtance, the leaſt ſpecimen of divine wiſdom out-ſhines the higheſt pitch of human wiſdom; " the fooliſhneſs " of GOD is wiſer than men," 1 Cor. i. 25. therefore " let not the wiſe man glory in his wiſdom," Jer. ix. 29. Of all things we ſhould not be proud of wiſdom; the proud man throws down the reputation of his wiſdom, by the way that he would raiſe it. No ſuch evidence of our folly, as a conceit that we are wiſe; *ſapientis animus nunquam turgeſcit, nunquam tumet*, Cic. To pride ourſelves in our wiſdom, is the way to have our folly made manifeſt. GOD threatens " to deſtroy the wiſdom of " the wiſe men," and " to turn their wiſdom into " fooliſhneſs."

3. We ſhould labour to partake of the wiſdom of GOD, ſo far as it is communicable. The greateſt wiſdom that we are capable of, is to diſtinguiſh between good and evil; " to be wiſe to that which is " good," as the apoſtle ſpeaks, Rom. xvi. 19. that is, to provide for the future in time, to make proviſion for eternity, to think of our latter end, to fear GOD and obey him, to be pure and peaceable, to receive inſtruction, and to win ſouls; theſe are the characters which the ſcripture gives of wiſdom. When Job had declared, that the excellency of the divine wiſdom was not to be attained by men; he tells us what that wiſdom is, which is proper for us: " and unto man he ſaid, the fear of the LORD, that " is

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" is wiſdom; and to depart from evil, that is un-
" derſtanding." There are many that are wiſe to worldly ends and purpoſes, as our SAVIOUR tells us; wiſe to get riches, and to aſcend to honours: but this is not the wiſdom which we are to labour after; this is but a ſhort-witted prudence, to ſerve a preſent turn, without any proſpect to the future, without regard to the next world, and the eternity which we are to live in; this is to be wiſe for a moment, and fools for ever.

4. If GOD be only wiſe, then put your truſt and confidence in him. Whom ſhould we truſt rather than infinite wiſdom, which manageth and directs infinite goodneſs and power? In all caſes of difficulty truſt him for direction, " acknowledge him in all " thy ways," that he may " direct thy ſteps; com-
" mit thy way unto the LORD, and lean not to
" thine own underſtanding. The race is not to
" the ſwift, nor the battle to the ſtrong," but the providence of GOD diſpoſeth all theſe things. And if we rely upon our own wiſdom, that will prove a broken reed. And as our own wiſdom is a broken reed, ſo the wiſdom of other men, Iſa. xxxi. 1, 2. GOD curſeth them that " go down into Egypt, and
" truſt to their ſtrength and wiſdom, but look not
" to the holy one of Iſrael, neither ſeek the LORD;
" yet he alſo is wiſe," ſaith the prophet.

5. Let us adore the wiſdom of GOD, and ſay with St. Paul, 1 Tim. i. 17. " To the only wiſe GOD,
" be honour and glory for ever and ever, Amen:"
and with Daniel, " bleſſed be the name of GOD for
" ever and ever, for wiſdom and might are his."
Veneration is the acknowledgment of an infinite excellency and perfection. We reverence any extraordinary degree of wiſdom in men; but the divine

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wiſdom, which is perfect and infinite, is matter of our adoration, and bleſſing and praiſe. Thankſgiving reſpects the benefits we receive: but we bleſs God when we acknowledge an excellency: for as God's bleſſing us is to do us good; ſo our bleſſing him is to ſpeak good of him: as all God's perfections are the objects of our bleſſing, ſo more eſpecially his wiſdom is of our praiſe; for the praiſe of God is to take notice of the wiſe deſign and contrivance of his goodneſs and mercy towards us.

Before I paſs on to the other particulars contained in theſe words, I cannot but take notice, that this wiſe God, here ſpoken of, is ſtiled our SAVIOUR, which ſome underſtand of our SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST, and bring this place as an argument to prove his divinity: and if that were ſo, it were all one to my purpoſe, which is in the next place to ſhew, that glory, and majeſty, and dominion, and power, belong to the divine being. But although I would not willingly part with any place that may fairly be brought for the proof of the divinity of CHRIST, yet ſeeing there are ſo many plain texts in ſcripture for the proof of it, we have the leſs reaſon to ſtretch doubtful places; and that this is ſo, will appear to any one who conſiders that the title of SAVIOUR is ſeveral times in ſcripture attributed to GOD the father; beſides that in a very ancient and authentic copy we find the words read ſomewhat otherwiſe, and ſo as to put this out of all controverſy, μόνῳ Θεῷ σωτῆρι ἡμῶν διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν δόξα, &c.

Having premiſed thus much for the clearing of theſe words, I ſhall briefly conſider, firſt, GOD's glory and majeſty, and then his dominion and ſovereignty.

Firſt, GOD's glory and majeſty. By majeſty, we

we may underſtand the greatneſs, or eminent excel- SERM. CXXXVI.
lency of the divine nature, which reſults from his perfections, and whereby the divine nature is ſet and placed infinitely above all other beings; I ſay, the eminent excellency of the divine nature, which reſults from his perfections, more eſpecially from thoſe great perfections, his goodneſs, and wiſdom, and power, and holineſs.

And his glory is a manifeſtation of this excellency, and a juſt acknowledgment and due opinion of it. Hence it is, that in ſcripture, GOD is ſaid to be "glorious in power," and "glorious in holineſs," and his goodneſs is called "his glory;" and here in the text, glory and majeſty are aſcribed to him upon the account of his wiſdom and goodneſs.

That theſe belong to GOD, I ſhall prove,

1. From the acknowledgment of natural light. The heathens did conſtantly aſcribe greatneſs to GOD, and that as reſulting chiefly from his goodneſs, as appears by their frequent conjunction of theſe two attributes, goodneſs and greatneſs. Opt. Max. were their moſt familiar titles of the Deity; to which I will add that known place of Seneca, *Primus deorum cultus eſt deos credere, dein reddere illis majeſtatem ſuam, reddere bonitatem, ſine quâ nulla majeſtas.*

2. From ſcripture. It were endleſs to produce all thoſe texts wherein greatneſs and glory are aſcribed to GOD. I ſhall mention two or three. Deut. x. 17. "the LORD is a great GOD;" Pſal. xxiv. 10. he is called "the king of glory;" civ. 1. he is ſaid to be "clothed with majeſty and honour. The "whole earth is full of his glory." Hither belong all thoſe doxologies in the old and new teſtament, wherein greatneſs, and glory, and majeſty are aſcribed to GOD.

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From all which we may learn,

1. What it is that makes a perſon great and glorious, and what is the way to majeſty, viz. "real "worth and excellency," and particularly, that kind of excellency which creatures are capable of in a very eminent degree, and that is goodneſs; this is that which advanceth a perſon, and gives him a pre-eminency above all others; this caſts a luſtre upon a man, and "makes his face to ſhine." Ariſtotle tells us, that honour is nothing elſe but the "ſignification of the eſteem which we have of a "perſon for his goodneſs; for, ſaith he, to be good, "and to do good, is the higheſt glory." GOD's goodneſs is his higheſt glory; and there is nothing ſo glorious in any creature, as herein to be like GOD.

2. Let us give GOD the glory which is due to his name; "aſcribe ye greatneſs to our GOD," Deut. xxxii. 3. "Give unto the LORD, O ye mighty, give "unto the LORD glory and power," Pſal. xxix. 1. The glory and majeſty of GOD calls for our eſteem and honour, our fear and reverence of him. Thus we ſhould "glorify GOD in our ſpirits," by an inward eſteem and reverence of his majeſty. The thoughts of earthly majeſty will compoſe us to reverence: how much more ſhould the apprehenſions of the divine majeſty ſtrike an awe upon our ſpirits in all our addreſſes to him? His excellency ſhould make us afraid, and keep us from all ſaucy boldneſs and familiarity with him. Reverence is an acknowledgment of the diſtance which is between the majeſty of GOD, and our meanneſs. And we ſhould "glorify him in our bo-"dies," with outward worſhip and adoration; that is, by all external ſignifications of reverence and reſpect; and we ſhould glorify him in our lives and actions. The higheſt glory a creature can give to GOD, is to endeavour

endeavour to be like him; *ſatis illos coluit, quiſquis imitatus eſt*, Seneca. Hereby we manifeſt and ſhew forth his excellency to the world, when we endeavour to be conformed to the divine perfections. And in caſe of ſin and provocation, we are to give glory to God by repentance, which is an acknowledgment of his holineſs, who hates ſin; and of his juſtice, which will puniſh it; and of the mercy of God, which is ready to pardon it; for it is the glory of God to paſs by a provocation. SERM. CXXXVI.

3. We ſhould take heed of robbing God of his glory, by giving it to any creature, by aſcribing thoſe titles, or that worſhip to any creature, which is due to God alone. This is the reaſon which is given of the ſecond commandment; "I the Lord "am a jealous God." God is jealous of his honour, "and will not give his glory to another, nor "his praiſe to graven images," Iſa. xlii. 8. Upon this account we find the apoſtle reproves the idolatry of the heathens, becauſe thereby they debaſed the eſteem of God, and did ſhew they had unworthy thoughts of him, Rom. i. 21, 23. "When "they knew God, they glorified him not as God, "but became vain in their imaginations: and chang-"ed the glory of the incorruptible God, into an "image made like to corruptible man, and to birds "and four-footed beaſts, and creeping things." Hereby they denied the glorious excellency of the divine nature; that is, that he is a ſpirit, and ſo incapable of being repreſented by any material or ſenſible image.

Secondly, I come now to ſpeak of the ſovereignty and dominion of God. In which I ſhall ſhew,

Firſt, what we are to underſtand by the ſovereignty and dominion of God. By theſe we mean the

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full and abſolute right, and title, and authority which God hath to, and over all his creatures, as his creatures, and made by him. And this right reſults from the effects of that goodneſs, and power, and wiſdom, whereby all things are and were made; from whence there doth accrue to God a ſovereign right and title to all his creatures, and a full and abſolute authority over them; that is, ſuch a right and authority, which doth not depend upon any ſuperior, nor is ſubject and accountable to any, for any thing that he does to any of his creatures. And this is that which is called *ſummum imperium*, becauſe there is no power above it to check or controul it, and therefore there can be none greater than this. And it is abſolute, becauſe all the creatures have what they have from God, and all depend upon his goodneſs, and therefore they owe all poſſible duty and perpetual ſubjection ſo long as they continue in being, becauſe it is ſolely by his power and goodneſs, that they continue; and therefore whatever right or title any one can pretend to any perſon or thing, that God hath to all things, *in Deo omnes tituli, omnia jura concurrunt.*

So that ſovereignty and dominion ſignifies a full right, and title, and propriety in all his creatures, and an abſolute authority over them, to govern them and diſpoſe of them, and deal with them in any way he pleaſeth, that is not contrary to his eſſential dignity and perfection, or repugnant to the natural ſtate and condition of the creature.

And for our better underſtanding of this, and the preventing of miſtakes, which men are apt to fall into about the ſovereignty of God, I will ſhew,

I. Wherein it doth not conſiſt. And,

II. Wherein it doth conſiſt.

I. Where-

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I. Wherein it doth not conſiſt.

1. Not in a right to gratify and delight himſelf in the extreme miſery of innocent and undeſerving creatures; I ſay, not in a right; for the right that GOD hath in his creatures, is founded in the benefits he hath conferred upon them, and the obligations they have to him upon that account. Now there is none, who becauſe he hath done a benefit, can have, by virtue of that, a right to do a greater evil than the good which he hath done amounts to; and I think it next to madneſs, to doubt whether extreme and eternal miſery be not a greater evil, than ſimple being is a good. I know they call it phyſical goodneſs; but I do not underſtand how any thing is the better for being called by a hard name. For what can there be that is good or deſirable in being, when it only ſerves to be a foundation of the greateſt and moſt laſting miſery? and we may ſafely ſay, that the juſt GOD will never challenge more than an equitable right. GOD doth not claim any ſuch ſovereignty to himſelf, as to cruſh and oppreſs innocent creatures without a cauſe, and to make them miſerable without a provocation. And becauſe it ſeems ſome have been very apt to entertain ſuch groundleſs jealouſies and unworthy thoughts of GOD, he hath given us his oath to aſſure us of the contrary. "As "I live, ſaith the LORD, I have no pleaſure in the "death of a ſinner, but rather that he ſhould turn "and live." So far is he from taking pleaſure in the miſery and ruin of innocent creatures, that in caſe of ſin and provocation, he would be much rather pleaſed, if ſinners would, by repentance, avoid and eſcape his juſtice, than that they ſhould fall under it. The good GOD cannot be glorified or pleaſed in doing evil to any, where juſtice doth not require

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quire it; nothing is further from infinite goodneſs, than to rejoice in evil. We account him a tyrant and a monſter of men, and of a deviliſh temper, that can do ſo; and we cannot do a greater injury to the good GOD, than to paint him out after ſuch a horrid and deformed manner.

2. The ſovereignty of GOD doth not conſiſt in impoſing laws upon his creatures, which are impoſſible either to be underſtood or obſerved by them. For this would not only be contrary to the dignity of the divine nature, but contradict the nature of a reaſonable creature, which, in reaſon, cannot be obliged by any power to impoſſibilities.

3. The ſovereignty of GOD doth not conſiſt in a liberty to tempt men to evil, or by any inevitable decree to neceſſitate them to ſin, or effectually to procure the ſins of men, and to puniſh them for them. For as this would be contrary to the holineſs, and juſtice, and goodneſs of GOD; ſo to the nature of a reaſonable creature, who cannot be guilty or deſerve puniſhment for what it cannot help. And men cannot eaſily have a blacker thought of GOD, than to imagine that he hath, from all eternity, carried on a ſecret deſign to circumvent the greateſt part of men into deſtruction, and underhand to draw men into a plot againſt heaven, that by this unworthy practice he may raiſe a revenue of glory to his juſtice. There is no generous and good man, but would ſpit in that man's face, that ſhould charge him with ſuch a deſign; and if they who are but very drops of goodneſs, in compariſon of GOD, the infinite ocean of goodneſs, would take it for ſuch a reproach, ſhall we attribute that to the beſt being in the world, which we would deteſt and abominate in ourſelves?

II. Wherein

II. Wherein the sovereignty of God doth consist. SERM. CXXXVI.

1. In a right to dispose of, and deal with his creatures in any way that doth not contradict the essential perfections of God, and the natural condition of the creature.

2. In a right to impose what laws he pleaseth upon his creatures, whether natural and reasonable; or positive, of trial of obedience, provided they contradict not the nature of God, or of the creature.

3. In a right to inflict due and deserved punishment in a case of provocation.

4. In a right to afflict any of his creatures, so the evil he inflicts be short of the benefits he hath conferred on them; yea, and farther, in a right when he pleaseth to annihilate the creature, and turn it out of being, if it should so seem good to him, though that creature have not offended him; because what he gave was his own, and he may without injury take it away again when he pleaseth. In these the sovereignty of God consists; and if there be any thing else that can be reconciled with the essential perfections of God.

Secondly, for the proof and confirmation of this. This is universally acknowledged by the heathens, that God is "the Lord and sovereign of the world, "and of all creatures." Hence Plato calls him τῶν ὅλων ἡγεμόνα; and Tully, *omnium rerum Dominum*, Lord of all; and this the scripture doth every where attribute to him, calling him, "Lord "of all, King of kings, and Lord of lords;" to which we may refer all those doxologies, in which power, and dominion, and authority are ascribed to God. I will only mention that eminent confession of Nebuchadnezzar, a great king, who, when his understanding came to him, was forced to acknowledge,

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knowledge, that "God was the moſt High," Dan. iv. 34, 35. I infer,

Firſt, negatively, we cannot, from the ſovereignty of God, infer a right to do any thing that is unſuitable to the perfection of his nature; and conſequently that we are to reſt ſatisfied with ſuch a notion of dominion and ſovereignty in God, as doth not plainly and directly contradict all the notions that we have of juſtice and goodneſs: nay, it would be little leſs than a horrid and dreadful blaſphemy, to ſay that God can, out of his ſovereign will and pleaſure, do any thing that contradicts the nature of God, and the eſſential perfections of the Deity; or, to imagine that the pleaſure and will of the holy, and juſt, and good God, is not always regulated and determined by the eſſential and indiſpenſable laws of goodneſs, and holineſs, and righteouſneſs.

Secondly, poſitively; we may infer from the ſovereignty and dominion of God,

1. That we ought to own and acknowledge God for our Lord and ſovereign, who by creating us, and giving us all that we have, did create to himſelf a right in us.

2. That we owe to him the utmoſt poſſibility of our love, "to love him with all our hearts, and "ſouls, and ſtrength;" becauſe the ſouls that we have, he gave us; and that we are in a capacity to love him, is his gift; and when we render theſe to him, we do but give him of his own.

3. We owe to him all imaginable ſubjection, and obſervance, and obedience; and are with all diligence, to the utmoſt of our endeavours, to conform ourſelves to his will, and to thoſe laws which he hath impoſed upon us.

4. In caſe of offence and diſobedience, we are, without murmuring, to ſubmit to what he ſhall inflict upon us, "to accept of the puniſhment of our "iniquity," and "patiently to bear the indignation "of the Lord," becauſe we have ſinned againſt him, who is our Lord and Sovereign. SERM. CXXXVI.

SERMON CXXXVII.

The wiſdom of God in the creation of the world.

PSALM civ. 24.

O Lord, *how manifold are thy works! in wiſdom haſt thou made them all.*

I AM treating of the attributes and properties of God, particularly thoſe which relate to the divine underſtanding, which I told you are his knowledge and wiſdom. I have finiſhed the firſt, the knowledge of God. The laſt day I ſpake concerning the wiſdom of God in general; but there are three eminent arguments, and famous inſtances of God's wiſdom, which I have reſerved for a more large and particular handling. The wiſdom of God ſhines forth in the creation of the world, in the government of it, and in the redemption of mankind by Jesus Christ. Of theſe three I ſhall ſpeak ſeverally. SERM. CXXXVII.

I begin with the firſt, the argument of God's wiſdom, which the creation doth furniſh us withal. In this viſible frame of the world which we behold with

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with our eyes, which way ſoever we look, we are encountered with ocular demonſtrations of the wiſdom of GOD. What the apoſtle ſaith of the power of GOD is true likewiſe of his wiſdom, Rom. i. 20. "The inviſible things of him from the crea-"tion of the world are clearly ſeen, being under-"ſtood by the things that are made, even his eter-"nal power and godhead:" ſo the eternal wiſdom of GOD is underſtood "by the things which are "made." Now the creation is an argument of the wiſdom of GOD, as it is an effect of admirable counſel and wiſdom. As any curious work, or rare engine doth argue the wit of the artificer; ſo the variety, and order, and regularity, and fitneſs of the works of GOD, argue the infinite wiſdom of him who made them; a work ſo beautiful and magnificent, ſuch a ſtately pile as heaven and earth is, ſo curious in the ſeveral pieces of it, ſo harmonious in all its parts, every part ſo fitted to the ſervice of the whole, and each part for the ſervice of another; is not this a plain argument that there was infinite wiſdom in the contrivance of this frame?

Now I ſhall endeavour to prove to you, that this frame of things which we ſee with our eyes, which we call the world, or the creation, is contrived after the beſt manner, and hath upon it evident impreſſions of counſel and wiſdom. I grant the wiſdom of GOD is infinite, and that many of the ends and deſigns of his wiſdom are "unſearchable, and "paſt finding out," both in the works of creation and providence; and that "though a wiſe man "ſeek to find out the works of GOD from the be-"ginning to the end, he ſhall not be able to do it;" and we ſhall never be able to exhauſt all the various wiſdom and contrivance which is in the works of GOD;

though

though the oftener, and the nearer we meditate upon them, the more we ſhall ſee to admire in them; the more we ſtudy this book of the creation, the more we ſhall be aſtoniſhed at the wiſdom of the author: but this doth not hinder, but that we may diſcover ſomething of the wiſdom of GOD, though it be infinite. As the effects of infinite power may fall under our ſenſes, ſo the deſigns of infinite wiſdom may fall under our reaſon and underſtanding; and when things appear to our beſt reaſon plainly to be ordered for the beſt, and the greateſt advantages of the world and mankind, ſo far as we are able to judge; and if they had been otherwiſe, as they might have been a hundred thouſand ways, they would not have been ſo well; we ought to conclude, that things are thus, and not otherwiſe, is the reſult of wiſdom. SERM. CXXXVII.

Now the wiſdom of GOD in the creation will appear by conſidering the works of GOD. Thoſe who have ſtudied nature, can diſcourſe theſe things more exactly and particularly. It would require perfect ſkill in aſtronomy, to declare the motions and order of heavenly bodies; and in anatomy, to read lectures of the rare contrivance of the bodies of living creatures. But this, as it is beyond my ability, ſo it would probably be above moſt of your capacities; therefore I ſhall content myſelf with ſome general and more obvious inſtances of the divine wiſdom, which ſhine forth ſo clear in his works, that "he that runs "may read it."

1. I ſhall take a ſhort ſurvey of the ſeveral parts of the world.

2. Single out man, the maſter-piece of the viſible creation.

1. If we ſurvey the world, and travel over the ſeveral parts of it in our thoughts, we ſhall find that all

SERM. CXXXVII. all things in it are made with the greateſt exactneſs, ranged in the moſt beautiful order, and ſerve the wiſeſt and beſt ends.

If we look up to heaven, and take notice only there of what is moſt viſible, the ſun, you ſee how by the wiſe order and conſtancy of it's courſe it makes day and night, winter and ſummer. This the pſalmiſt takes notice of, Pſal. xix. 1, 2. "The "heavens declare the glory of GOD, and the firma- "ment ſheweth his handy work. Day unto day "uttereth ſpeech; and night unto night ſheweth "knowledge." It may eaſily be imagined many ways, how the ſun might have had another courſe in reference to the earth; but no man can deviſe any other, that ſhould not be very much to the prejudice of the world; ſo that this being the beſt, it is an argument that wiſdom had the ordering and diſpoſing of it.

If we look down to the earth, we ſhall ſee gods aſcending and deſcending; I mean clear repreſentations of divine wiſdom in the treaſures that are hid in the bowels of it, and thoſe fruits that grow upon the ſurface of it. What vaſt heaps, and what variety of uſeful materials and minerals are ſcattered up and down in the earth, as one would think with a careleſs hand, but yet ſo wiſely diſperſt, as is moſt proper for the neceſſities and uſes of ſeveral countries! Look upon the ſurface of the earth, and you ſhall find it clothed and adorned with plants of various and admirable frame, and beauty, and uſefulneſs. Look upon the vaſt ocean, and there you may ſee the wiſdom of God in bridling and reſtraining that unruly element, I mean, in ſinking it below the earth; whereas the water might have been above and covered the earth, and then the earth had been in a great meaſure

meaſure uſeleſs, and incapable of thoſe inhabitants which now poſſeſs it.

Look again upon the earth, and in the air, and ſea, and you ſhall find all theſe inhabited and furniſhed with great ſtore of living creatures of ſeveral kinds, wonderfully made in the frame of their bodies, endowed with ſtrong inclination to increaſe their kinds, and with a natural affection and care towards their young ones; and every kind of theſe creatures armed either with ſtrength or wit to oppoſe their enemy, or ſwiftneſs to fly from him, or ſtrong holds to ſecure themſelves. But the creation is a vaſt field, in which we may eaſily loſe ourſelves. I ſhall therefore call home our wandring thoughts; for we need not go out of ourſelves for a proof of divine wiſdom. I ſhall therefore,

2. Select the choiceſt piece of it, man, who is the top and perfection of this viſible world. What is ſaid of the elephant, or behemoth, Job xl. 19. in reſpect of the vaſt bigneſs and ſtrength of his body, is only abſolutely true of man, that he is *divini opificii caput*, "the chief of the works of GOD, and upon "earth there is none like him." Man is *mundi utriſque nexus*, "the bond of both worlds," as Scaliger calls him, in whom the world of bodies, and the world of ſpirits do meet, and unite; for in reſpect to his body, he is related to this viſible world, and is of the earth; but in reſpect of his ſoul, he is allied to heaven, and deſcended from above. We have looked above us, and beneath us, and about us, upon the ſeveral repreſentations of GOD's wiſdom, and the ſeveral parts of the creation; but we have not yet conſidered the beſt piece of the viſible world, which we may ſpeak of, without flattery of ourſelves, and to the praiſe of our Maker. GOD, when he had

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made the world, "he made man after his own "image." When he had finiſhed the other part of the creation, he was pleaſed to ſet up this picture of himſelf in it, as a memorial of the workman. Now we ſhall a little more particularly conſider this piece of GOD's workmanſhip, being it is better known and more familiar to us, as it is more excellent than the reſt, and conſequently a higher inſtance of the divine wiſdom. It is obſerved by ſome, that concerning the parts of the creation, GOD ſpeaks the word, "let there be light," and "let there be a firma-"ment, and there was ſo:" but when he comes to make man, he doth, as it were, deliberate, and enter into conſultation about him; "And GOD ſaid, "let us make man in our image, after our likeneſs; "and let him have dominion," Gen. i. 26; as if man, above all the reſt, were the effect and reſult of divine wiſdom, and the creature of his counſel.

Man may be conſidered either in himſelf, and in reſpect of the parts of which he conſiſts, ſoul and body; or with relation to the univerſe, and other parts of the creation.

1. Conſider him in himſelf, as compounded of ſoul and body. Conſider man in his outward and worſe part, and you ſhall find that to be admirable, even to aſtoniſhment; in reſpect of which, the pſalmiſt cries out, Pſal. cxxxix. 14. "I am fearfully and "wonderfully made; marvellous are thy works, "and that my ſoul knoweth right well." The frame of our bodies is ſo curiouſly wrought, and every part of it ſo full of miracle, that Galen (who was otherwiſe backward enough to the belief of a GOD) when he had anatomized man's body, and carefully ſurveyed the frame of it, viewed the fitneſs and uſefulneſs of every part of it, and the many ſeveral intentions

tions of every little vein, and bone, and muſcle, and the beauty of the whole; he fell into a pang of devotion, and wrote a hymn to his Creator. And thoſe excellent books of his, *de uſu partium*, "of "the uſefulneſs and convenient contrivance of every "part of the body," are a moſt exact demonſtration of the divine wiſdom, which appears in the make of our body; of which books, Gaſſendus ſaith, the whole work is writ with a kind of enthuſiaſm. The wiſdom of GOD, in the frame of our bodies, very much appears by a curious conſideration of the ſeveral parts of it; but that requiring a very accurate ſkill in anatomy, I chuſe rather wholly to forbear it, than by my unſkilfulneſs to be injurious to the divine wiſdom. SERM. CXXXVII.

But this *domicilium corporis*, "the houſe of our "body," though indeed it be a curious piece; yet it is nothing to the noble inhabitant that dwells in it. This cabinet, though it be exquiſitely wrought, and very rich; yet it comes infinitely ſhort in value of the jewel that is hid and laid up in it. How does the glorious faculty of reaſon and underſtanding exalt us above the reſt of the creatures! Nature hath not made that particular proviſion for man, which it hath made for other creatures, becauſe it hath provided for him in general, in giving him a mind and reaſon. Man is not born cloathed, nor armed with any conſiderable weapon for defence; but he hath reaſon and underſtanding to provide theſe things for himſelf; and this alone excels all the advantages of other creatures: he can keep himſelf warmer and ſafer; he can foreſee dangers and provide againſt them; he can provide weapons that are better than horns, and teeth, and paws, and by the advantage of his reaſon, is too hard for all other creatures, and can defend himſelf againſt their violence.

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If we conſider the mind of man yet nearer, how many arguments of divinity are there in it! That there ſhould be at once in our underſtandings diſtinct comprehenſions of ſuch variety of objects; that it ſhould paſs in its thoughts from heaven to earth in a moment, and retain the memory of things paſt, and take a proſpect of the future, and look forward as far as eternity! Becauſe we are familiar to our ſelves, we cannot be ſtrange and wonderful to our ſelves; but the great miracle of the world is the mind of man, and the contrivance of it an eminent inſtance of GOD's wiſdom.

2. Conſider man with relation to the univerſe, and you ſhall find the wiſdom of GOD doth appear, in that all things are made ſo uſeful for man, who was deſigned to be the chief inhabitant of this viſible world, the gueſt whom GOD deſigned principally to entertain in this houſe which he built. Not that we are to think, that GOD hath ſo made all things for man, that he hath not made them at all for himſelf, and poſſibly for many other uſes than we can imagine; for we much over-value ourſelves, if we think them to be only for us; and we diminiſh the wiſdom of GOD, in reſtraining it to one end: but the chief and principal end of many things is the uſe and ſervice of man; and in reference to this end, you ſhall find that GOD hath made abundant and wiſe proviſion.

More particularly we will conſider man,

1. In his natural capacity, as a part of the world. How many things are there in the world for the ſervice and pleaſure, for the uſe and delight of man, which, if man were not in the world, would be of little uſe? Man is by nature a contemplative creature, and GOD hath furniſhed him with many objects to exerciſe

ercise his underſtanding upon, which would be ſo far uſeleſs and loſt, if man were not. Who ſhould obſerve the motions of the ſtars, and the courſes of thoſe heavenly bodies, and all the wonders of nature? Who ſhould pry into the ſecret virtues of plants, and other natural things, if there were not in the world a creature endowed with reaſon and underſtanding? Would the beaſts of the field ſtudy aſtronomy, or turn chymiſts, and try experiments in nature? SERM. CXXXVII.

What variety of beautiful plants and flowers is there! which can be imagined to be of little other uſe but for the pleaſure of man. And if man had not been, they would have loſt their grace, and been trod down by the beaſts of the field, without pity or obſervation; they would not have made them into garlands and noſegays. How many ſorts of fruits are there which grow upon high trees, out of the reach of beaſts! and indeed they take no pleaſure in them. What would all the vaſt bodies of trees have ſerved for, if man had not been to build with them, and make dwellings of them? Of what uſe would all the mines of metal have been, and of coal, and the quarries of ſtone? Would the mole have admired the fine gold? Would the beaſts of the foreſt have built themſelves palaces, or would they have made fires in their dens?

2. Conſider man in his geographical capacity, as I may call it, in relation to his habitation in this or that climate or country. The wiſdom of God hath ſo ordered things, that the neceſſities of every country are ſupplied one way or other. Egypt hath no rains: but the river Nilus overflows it, and makes it fruitful. Under the line, where there are exceſſive heats, every day there are conſtant gales and

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breezes of cool wind, to fan and refreſh the ſcorched inhabitants. The hotter countries are furniſhed with materials for ſilk, a light cloathing; we that are cooler here in England, with materials for cloth, a warmer clothing; Ruſſia and Muſcovy, which are extreme cold, are provided with warm furs, and ſkins of beaſts.

3. Conſider man in his capacity of commerce and intercourſe. Man is a ſociable creature; beſides the advantages of commerce with remoter nations, for ſupplying every country with thoſe conveniencies and commodities, which each doth peculiarly afford. And here the wiſdom of GOD does plainly appear, in diſpoſing the ſea into ſeveral parts of the world, for the more ſpeedy commerce and intercourſe of ſeveral nations. Now if every country had brought forth all commodities, that had been needleſs and ſuperfluous, becauſe they might have been had without commerce; beſides, that the great encouragement of intercourſe among nations, which is ſo agreeable to human nature, would have been taken away: if every country had been, as now it is, deſtitute of many things other countries have, and there had been no ſea to give an opportunity of traffick! the world had been very defective as to the uſe of man. Now here appears the wiſdom of GOD, that the world, and all things in it, are contrived for the beſt.

Thus I have endeavoured to do ſomething towards the diſplaying of GOD's wiſdom in the workmanſhip of the world; although I am very ſenſible how much I have been maſtered and oppreſſed by the greatneſs and weight of ſo noble an argument. For "who can declare the works of GOD! and who can "ſhew forth all his praiſe!"

The uſe I ſhall make of what has been ſaid, ſhall be in three particulars.

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1. This confutes the Epicureans, who impute the world, and this orderly and beautiful frame of things to chance. Thoſe things which are the proper effects of counſel, and bear the plain impreſſion of wiſdom upon them, ought not to be attributed to chance. What a madneſs is it to grant all things to be as well made, as if the wiſeſt agent upon counſel and deſign had contrived them; and yet to aſcribe them to chance! Now he that denies things to be ſo wiſely framed, muſt pick holes in the creation, and ſhew ſome fault and irregularity in the frame of things, which no man ever yet pretended to do. Did ever any anatomiſt pretend to ſhew how the body of man might have been better contrived, and fitter for the uſes of a reaſonable creature than it is; or any aſtronomer to rectify the courſe of the ſun? As for the extravagant and blaſphemous ſpeech of Alphonſus, "that if he had ſtood at GOD's elbow "when he made the world, he could have told him "how to have made it better;" beſides his pride, it ſhews nothing but his ignorance; that he built his aſtronomy upon a falſe hypotheſis, as is generally believed now by the learned in that ſcience; and no wonder he found fault with the world, when he miſtook the frame of it: but thoſe who have been moſt verſed in nature, and have moſt pried into the ſecrets of it, have moſt admired the workmanſhip both of the great world, and the leſs.

But if we muſt ſuppoſe the world to be as well made as wiſdom could contrive it, which is generally granted; it is a monſtrous folly to impute it to chance. A man might better ſay, Archimedes did not make any of his engines by ſkill, but by chance; and might more eaſily maintain, that cardinal Richlieu did not manage affairs by any art or policy,

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but they fell out by mere chance. What pitiful ſhifts is Epicurus put to, when the beſt account he can give of the world is this; "that matter always "was, and the patts of it in motion, and after a "great many trials, the parts of matter at length "hampered themſelves in this fortunate order where- "in they now are; that men, at firſt, grew out of "the earth, were nouriſhed by the navel-ſtring, and "when they were ſtrong enough, broke looſe and "weaned themſelves; that the noſtrils were made "by the waters making themſelves a paſſage out "of the body; and the ſtomach and bowels by the "waters forcing a paſſage downward; that the "members of the body were not made for thoſe "uſes for which they ſerve, but chanced to be ſo, "and the uſes afterwards found out." Is it worth the while to advance ſuch ſenſeleſs opinions as theſe, to deny the wiſdom of God? Is it not much eaſier, and more reaſonable to ſay, that the wiſdom of God made all theſe things, than to trouble ourſelves to imagine how all things ſhould happen thus conveniently by chance? Did you ever know any great work, in which there was variety of parts, and an orderly diſpoſition of them required, done by chance, and without the direction of wiſdom and counſel? How long time might a man take to jumble a ſet of four and twenty letters together, before they would fall out to be an exact poem; yea, or to make a book of tolerable ſenſe, though but in proſe? How long might a man ſprinkle oil and colours upon canvas, with a careleſs hand, before this would produce the exact picture of a man? And is a man eaſier made by chance, than his picture? He that tells me that this great and curious frame of the world was made by chance, I could much more believe him,

if he ſhould tell me that Henry the VII.'s chapel in Weſtminſter was not built by any mortal man, but the ſtones did grow in thoſe forms into which they ſeem to us to be cut and graven; that the ſtones, and timber, and iron, and braſs, and all the other materials came thither by chance, and upon a day met all happily together, and put themſelves into that delicate order, in which we ſee them ſo cloſe compacted, that it muſt be a great chance that parts them again. Now, is it not much eaſier to imagine how a ſkilful workman ſhould raiſe a building, than how timber, and ſtones, and how that variety of materials which is required to a great and ſtately building, ſhould meet together all of a juſt bigneſs, and exactly fitted, and by chance take their places, and range themſelves into that order? I inſiſt the longer upon this, becauſe I am ſenſible how much atheiſm hath gained in this age.

2. Let us admire, and adore, and praiſe the wiſdom of GOD, "who hath eſtabliſhed the world by "his wiſdom, and ſtretched out the heavens by his "underſtanding; who hath made all things in num-"ber, weight, and meaſure;" that is, by exact wiſdom. The wiſe works of GOD are the proper object of our praiſe; and this is a day proper for the work of praiſe and thankſgiving. Now under the goſpel, ſince CHRIST was clearly revealed, we have new matter of praiſe and thankſgiving; but as GOD has given us CHRIST, ſo he hath given us our beings. We are not ſo to remember our Redeemer, as to forget our Creator. The goodneſs, and power, and wiſdom of GOD, which appears in the creation of the world, ought ſtill to be matter of admiration and praiſe to Chriſtians. It is a great fault and neglect among chriſtians, that they are not more

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more taken up with the works of GOD, and the contemplation of the wiſdom which ſhines forth in them. We are apt enough to admire other things, little toys; but we overlook this vaſt curious engine of the world, and the great artificer of all things. It was truly ſaid by one, that moſt men are ſo ſtupid and inconſiderate, as to admire the works of a painter or a carver, more than the works of GOD. There are many that have beſtowed more eloquence in the praiſe of a curious picture, or an exact building, than ever they did upon this noble and exquiſite frame of the world, or any of the other works of GOD. We can admire the wiſdom, and deſign, and ſkill of petty artiſts, and little engineers; but here is wiſdom in the beauty and order of the creation. Did we love GOD, and take pleaſure in the effects of his wiſdom and power, we ſhould be more in the contemplation of them. Pſal. cxi. 2. "The "works of the LORD are great, ſought out of all "them that have pleaſure therein." Let us then ſay with the pſalmiſt; "O LORD, how manifold "are thy works! in wiſdom haſt thou made them "all; the earth is full of thy riches," &c.

More particularly let us, with an humble thankfulneſs, admire the wiſdom which hath made and diſpoſed all things ſo fitly for our uſe and ſervice, and with ſo merciful a reſpect to us: the light and influence of heaven; the beaſts and the fruits of the earth. We find the Pſalmiſt often praiſing GOD upon this account, Pſal. cxxxvi. 4, 5, &c. The wiſdom which hath framed theſe bodies of ours. Pſal. cxxxix. 14, 15, 16. which hath endowed us with knowledge and underſtanding. Elihu complains, that men were apt to overlook theſe great bleſſings of GOD; Job xxxv. 10, 11, 12. "But none ſaith, where is GOD "my

" my maker, who giveth ſongs in the night? who SERM.
" teacheth us more than the beaſts of the earth, CXXXVII.
" and maketh us wiſer than the fowls of heaven?
" There they cry, but none giveth anſwer, becauſe
" of the pride of evil men."

3. Uſe. Truſt the wiſdom of GOD, which made the world, to govern it, and the affairs of it; and the wiſdom which hath framed thy body in ſo curious and exquiſite a manner, and formed thy ſpirit within thee, and hath made ſo many creatures, with reference to thy neceſſity and comfort, truſt him for thy future proviſion. Mat. vi. 25. " I ſay unto
" you, take no thought for your lives, what ye
" ſhall eat, &c. Is not the life more than meat?
" and the body than rayment?" He hath given us our ſouls, he hath breathed into us the breath of life, and made theſe bodies without our care and thought; he hath done the greater, will he not do the leſs? When thou art ready anxiouſly and ſolicitouſly to ſay, what ſhall I do for the neceſſaries of life? Conſider whence thou didſt receive thy life, who made this body of thine; thou mayeſt be aſſured, that the wiſdom which hath created theſe, conſidered how to ſupply them; the wiſdom of GOD knew that you would want all theſe, and hath accordingly provided for them, therefore fear not.

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SERMON CXXXVIII.

The wiſdom of GOD in his providence.

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1 PETER v. 7.

Caſting all your care upon him, for he careth for you.

SERM. CXXXVIII. Preached at Kenſington.

AMONGST the ſeveral duties which, towards the concluſion of this epiſtle, the apoſtle exhorts chriſtians to, this is one, not to be overmuch ſolicitous and concerned about what may befall us, but to refer ourſelves to the providence of GOD, which takes care of us. In ſpeaking to this argument, I ſhall

I. Conſider the nature of the duty here required, which is "to caſt our care upon GOD."

II. The argument uſed to perſuade us to it: becauſe "he careth for us."

I. For the nature of the duty here required. The word μέριμνα ſignifies an anxious care about events, a care that is accompanied with trouble and diſquiet of mind about what may befal us; about the good that we hope for and deſire, or about the evil which we fear may come upon us. This the apoſtle exhorts us to throw off; and to leave to the providence of GOD, and his care, all thoſe events which we are apt to be ſo ſolicitous and diſquieted about. The expreſſion ſeems to be taken out of Pſal. lv. 22. "caſt "thy burthen upon the LORD, and he ſhall ſuſ"tain thee."

Now that we may not miſtake our duty in this matter, I ſhall ſhew what is not here meant by "caſt"ing all our care upon GOD;" and then, what is meant by it.

The apoſtle doth not here intend to take men off from a provident care and diligence about the concernments of this life; this is not only contrary to reaſon, but to many expreſs precepts and paſſages of ſcripture, wherein diligence is recommended to us, and the bleſſing of GOD, and the good ſucceſs of our affairs promiſed thereto; wherein we are commanded to provide for thoſe of our family, which cannot be done without ſome ſort of care; and wherein ſlothfulneſs and negligence are condemned, and threatened with poverty; ſo that this is not "to caſt "our care upon GOD," to take no care of ourſelves, to uſe no diligence and endeavour for the obtaining of the good which we deſire, and the prevention of the evil we fear; this is to tempt the providence of GOD, and to caſt that burthen upon him, which he expects we ſhould bear ourſelves.

But by "caſting our care upon GOD," the apoſtle intends theſe two things.

1. That after all prudent care and diligence have been uſed by us, we ſhould not be farther ſolicitous, nor trouble ourſelves about the event of things, which, when we have done all we can, will be out of our power. And this certainly is our SAVIOUR's meaning, when he bids us "take no care for the "morrow." When we have done what is fit for us for the preſent to do, we ſhould not diſquiet and torment ourſelves about the iſſue and event of things.

2. "Caſting our care upon GOD," implies, that we ſhould refer the iſſue of things to his providence, which is continually vigilant over us, and knows how to diſpoſe of all things to the beſt; entirely confiding in his wiſdom and goodneſs, that he will order all things for our good, and in that confidence reſolving to reſt ſatisfied and contented with the diſpoſals of his providence, whatever they be.

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You ſee then the nature of the duty which the a poſtle here exhorts to, viz. That after all pruder care and diligence have been uſed on our parts, w ſhould not be diſquieted in our minds about th event of things, but leave them to GOD, who hat the care of us, and all our concernments. Whic is the

II. Thing I propoſed to ſpeak to, and which I ir tend chiefly to inſiſt upon, viz. The argument whic the apoſtle here uſeth to perſuade us to this dut of "caſting all our care upon GOD," becauſe "it "he that careth for us:" and this implies in it the two things.

1. In general, that the providence of GOD gover the world, and concerns itſelf in the affairs of me and diſpoſeth of all events that happen to us.

2. More particularly, that this providence is p culiarly concerned for good men, and that he tak a ſpecial care of them and their concerns; "H "careth for you." The apoſtle ſpeaks this to then not only as men, but as Chriſtians. And thus th pſalmiſt, from whom theſe words ſeem to be take does apply and limit this promiſe; "Caſt thy bu "then upon the LORD, and he ſhall ſuſtain thee "he ſhall never ſuffer the righteous to be moved.

1. That GOD taketh care of us, implies in gen ral, that the providence of GOD governs the worl and concerns itſelf in the affairs of men, and diſpo eth of all events that happen to us. I ſhall not no enter upon a large proof of the providence of Go that is too large and intricate an argument for a ſho diſcourſe, and hath a great deal of nicety and diff culty in it; and though it be a fundamental princip of religion, and hath been almoſt generally entertai ed and believed by mankind, and that upon very goo

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reaſon; yet becauſe the vindication of many particu- SERM. CXXXVIII.
lar appearances of providence, does in a great meaſure depend upon a full view and comprehenſion of the whole deſign, therefore we muſt neceſſarily refer ourſelves, for full ſatisfaction, as to ſeveral difficulties and objections, to the other world, when we ſhall ſee GOD's works, together with the relation of every part to the whole deſign, and then many particular paſſages, which may now ſeem odd and crooked, as we look upon them by themſelves, will, in relation to the whole, appear to have a great deal of reaſon and regularity in them.

Therefore I ſhall at preſent only briefly, and in the general, ſhew that it is very credible, that there is a wiſe providence that governs the world, and intereſts itſelf in the affairs of men, and diſpoſeth of all events which happen to us.

And I deſire it may be obſerved in the entrance upon this argument, that the handling of this queſtion concerning providence, doth ſuppoſe the being of GOD, and that "he made the world," as principles already known and granted, before we come to diſpute of his providence; for it would be vain to argue about the providence of GOD, with thoſe who queſtion his being, and whether "the world "was made by him:" But ſuppoſing theſe two principles, "that GOD is," and "that he made the "world," it is very credible that he ſhould take care of the government of it, and eſpecially of one of the nobleſt parts of it, the race of mankind. For we cannot believe, that he, who employed ſo much power and wiſdom in the raiſing of this great and magnificent pile, and furniſhing every part of it with ſuch variety of creatures, ſo exquiſitely and ſo wiſely fitted for the uſe and ſervice of one another, ſhould

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ſo ſoon as he had perfected it, forſake his own workmanſhip, and take no farther care of it; eſpecially conſidering that it is no trouble and diſquiet to him, either to take notice of what is done here below, or to interpoſe for the regulating of any diſorders that may happen; for infinite knowledge, and wiſdom, and power, can do all things with all imaginable eaſe, knows all things, and can do all things, without any diſturbance of it's own happineſs.

And this hath always been the common apprehenſion of mankind, that GOD knows all things, and obſerves every thing that is done in the world, and when he pleaſeth, interpoſes in the affairs of it. It is true indeed, the Epicureans did deny that GOD either made the world or governs it; and therefore wiſe men always doubted whether they did indeed believe the being of GOD, or not; but being unwilling to incur the danger of ſo odious an opinion, they were content, for faſhion ſake, to own his being, provided they might take away the beſt and moſt ſubſtantial arguments for the proof of it. The reſt of the philoſophers owned a providence, at leaſt a general providence, that took care of great and more important matters, but did not deſcend to a conſtant and particular care of every perſon, and every little event belonging to them, *interdum curioſus ſingulorum*, ſays Tully; now and then, when he pleaſes, he takes care of particular perſons, and their leſſer concernments; but many of them thought that GOD did generally neglect the ſmaller and more inconſiderable affairs of the world, *Dii minora negligunt neque agellos ſingulorum & viticulas perſequuntur*, "the gods overlook ſmaller matters, and "do not mind every man's little field and vine." Such imperfect apprehenſions had they of the provi-

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dence of GOD. And though they would ſeem here- SERM. CXXXVIII.
by to conſult the dignity and eaſe of the Deity, by exempting him from the care and trouble of leſſer matters, yet, in truth and reality, they caſt a diſhonourable reflection upon him, as if it were a burthen to infinite knowledge, and power, and goodneſs, to take care of every thing.

But now divine revelation hath put this matter out of doubt, by aſſuring us of GOD's particular care of all perſons and events. Our SAVIOUR tells us, that GOD's providence extends to the leaſt and moſt inconſiderable creatures; "to the graſs of the "field, which to day is, and to morrow is caſt in- "to the oven," Mat. vi. 30. "To the fowls of "the air," and that to the leaſt of them, even to "the ſparrows, two of which are ſold for a farthing, "and yet not one of them falleth to the ground "without GOD," Mat. x. 29. Much more doth the providence of GOD extend to men, which are creatures far more conſiderable, and to the very leaſt thing that belongs to us, "to the very hairs "of our head, which are all numbered;" the loweſt inſtance that can be thought on.

So that the light of nature owns a more general providence; and divine revelation hath rectified thoſe imperfect apprehenſions which men had about it, and hath ſatisfied us, that it extends itſelf to all particulars, and even to the leaſt things and moſt inconſiderable. And this is no ways incredible, conſidering the infinite perfection of the divine nature, in reſpect of which GOD can with as much and greater eaſe take care of every thing, than we can do of any one thing; and the belief of this is the great foundation of religion. Men therefore pray to GOD for the good they want, and to be freed

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from the evils they fear, becauſe they believe that he always regards and hears them. Men therefore make conſcience of their duty, becauſe they believe God obſerves them, and will reward and puniſh their good and evil deeds. So that take away the providence of God, and we pull down one of the main pillars upon which religion ſtands; we rob ourſelves of one of the greateſt comforts, and beſt refuges in the afflictions and calamities of this life and of all our hopes of happineſs in the next.

And though there be many diſorders in the world eſpecially in the affairs of man, the moſt irregular and intractable piece of God's creation; yet this is far from being a ſufficient objection againſt the providence of God, if we conſider that God made man a free creature, and capable of abuſing his liberty and intends this preſent life for a ſtate of trial in order to another, where men ſhall receive the juſt recompence of their actions here: and then if we conſider, that many of the evils and diſorders, which God permits to happen, are capable of being overruled by him to a greater good, and are made many times to ſerve wiſe and excellent purpoſes, and that the providence of God does ſometimes viſibly and remarkably interpoſe, for the prevention and remedy of great diſorders and confuſions; I ſay, conſidering all this, it is no blemiſh to the divine providence, to permit many of thoſe irregularities which are in the world, and ſuffer the fates of good and bad men to be ſo croſs and unequal in this life. For ſuppoſing another life after this, wherein men ſhall come to an account, and every man ſhall receive the juſt recompence of his actions, there will then be a proper ſeaſon and full opportunity of ſetting all things ſtraight, and no man ſhall have reaſon then, either to glory

in his wickedneſs, or to complain of his ſufferings in this world. This is the firſt, that GOD's providence governs the world, and intereſts itſelf in the affairs of men, and diſpoſeth of all events that happen to them; and this is a very good reaſon, why we ſhould caſt our particular cares upon him, who hath undertaken the government of the whole. SERM. cxxxviii.

2. The providence of GOD is more peculiarly concerned for good men, and he takes a more particular and eſpecial care of them. The apoſtle ſpeaks this to Chriſtians, "caſt all your care on him, for he "careth for you." And this David limits in a more particular manner to good men; "caſt thy "burthen upon the LORD, and he will ſuſtain thee; "he ſhall never ſuffer the righteous to be moved."

The providence of GOD many times preſerves good men from thoſe evils which happen to others, and by a peculiar and remarkable interpoſition, reſcues them out of thoſe calamities which it ſuffers others to fall into; and GOD many times bleſſeth good men, with remarkable proſperity and ſucceſs in their affairs. To which purpoſe there are innumerable declarations and promiſes in the holy ſcriptures, ſo well known, that I ſhall not trouble you with the recital of them.

Notwithſtanding which, it cannot be denied, that good men fall into many evils, and are harraſſed with great afflictions in this world: but then the providence of GOD uſually ordereth it ſo, that they are armed with great patience to bear them, and find great comfort and ſupport under them, and make better uſe and improvement of them than others; ſo that one way or other they turn to their advantage. So the apoſtle aſſures us, Rom. viii. 28. "we know "that all things work together for good to them

SERM. cxxxviii. "that love GOD." All the evils and afflictions, which happen to good men, conſpire one way or other to the promoting of their happineſs, many times in this world, to be ſure they make a great addition to it in the other. So the apoſtle tells us, 2 Cor. iv. 17, 18. "Our light affliction, "which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far "more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, whilſt "we look not," &c. And can we ſay GOD's providence neglects us, when he rewards our temporal ſufferings with eternal glory: when through many hardſhips and tribulations, he at laſt brings us to a kingdom? Was Joſeph neglected by GOD, when by a great deal of hard uſage, and a long impriſonment, he was raiſed to the higheſt dignity in a great kingdom? Or rather, was not the providence of GOD very remarkable towards him, in making thoſe ſufferings ſo many ſteps to his glory, and the occaſion of his advancement? And is not GOD's providence towards good men as kind and as remarkable, in bringing them to an infinitely better and more glorious kingdom, by tribulations and ſufferings; and making "our light afflictions, which are but for "a moment, to work for us a far more exceeding "and eternal weight of glory?"

Thus you ſee what is implied in GOD's care of us in general; that he governs the world, and diſpoſeth all events; and particularly, that he is peculiarly concerned for good men, and takes a more eſpecial care of them. Let us now ſee of what force this conſideration is, to perſuade to the duty enjoined in the text, "to caſt all our care upon GOD;" that is, after all prudent care and diligence hath been uſed on our part, not to be anxious and ſolicitous about the event of things, but to leave that to GOD. Now this

this conſideration, that "God cares for us," ſhould be an argument to us, "to caſt all our care upon "him," upon theſe two accounts: SERM. cxxxviii.

1. Becauſe if "God cares for us," our concernments are in the beſt and ſafeſt hands.

2. Becauſe all our anxiety and ſolicitude will do us no good.

1. Becauſe if "God cares for us," our concernments are in the beſt and ſafeſt hands, and where we ſhould deſire to have them; infinitely ſafer, than under any care and conduct of our own. And this ought to be a great ſatisfaction to our minds, and to free us from all diſquieting thoughts; for if God undertakes the care of us, then we are ſure that nothing ſhall happen to us, but by the diſpoſal or permiſſion of infinite wiſdom and goodneſs. There are many things indeed, which to us ſeem chance and accident; but in reſpect of God, they are providence and deſign; they may appear to happen by chance, or may proceed from the ill-will and malicious intent of ſecond cauſes, but they are all wiſely deſigned; and as they are appointed or permitted by God, they are the reſult of the deepeſt counſel, and the greateſt goodneſs. And can we wiſh that we and our concernments ſhould be in better or ſafer hands, than of infinite power and wiſdom, in conjunction with infinite love and goodneſs? And if we be careful to do our duty, and to demean ourſelves towards God as we ought, we may reſt aſſured of his love and care of us; and if we do in good earneſt believe the providence of God, we cannot but think that he hath a peculiar regard to thoſe that love and ſerve him, and that he will take a peculiar care of their concernments, and that he can, and will diſpoſe them better for us, than we could manage them ourſelves, if we were left

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to ourſelves, and our affairs were put into the hands of our own counſel.

Put the caſe we had the entire ordering and diſpoſal of ourſelves, what were reaſonable for us to do in this caſe? We would ſurely, according to our beſt wiſdom and judgment, do the beſt we could for ourſelves; and when upon experience of our manifold ignorance and weakneſs, we had found our weightieſt affairs and deſigns frequently to miſcarry, for want of fore-ſight, or power, or ſkill to obviate and prevent the infinite hazards and diſappointments which human affairs are liable to, we ſhould then look about us; and if we knew any perſon much wiſer, and more powerful than ourſelves, who we believed did heartily love us, and wiſh well to us, we would out of kindneſs to ourſelves, aſk his counſel in our affairs, and crave his aſſiſtance; and if we could prevail with him to undertake the care of our concernments, we would commit them all to his conduct and government, in confidence of his great wiſdom and good-will to us.

Now GOD is ſuch an one, he loves us as well as we do ourſelves, and deſires our happineſs as much, and knows infinitely better than we do, what means are moſt conducing to it, and will moſt effectually ſecure it. And every man that believes thus of GOD, (as every man muſt do, that believes there is a GOD, for theſe are the natural and eſſential notions which all men have of the Deity) I ſay, every man that believes thus of GOD; the firſt thing he would do (if he knew not already that GOD had voluntarily, and of his own accord, undertaken the care of him and of his affairs) would be to apply himſelf to GOD, and to beſeech him with all earneſtneſs and importunity, that he would permit him to refer his concernments

to

to him, and be pleaſed to undertake the care of them; and he would, without any demur or difficulty, give up himſelf wholly to him, to guide and govern him, and to diſpoſe of him as to him ſhould ſeem beſt. SERM. CXXXVIII.

Now if GOD have prevented us herein, and without our deſire taken this care upon himſelf, we ought to rejoice in it, as the greateſt happineſs that could poſſibly have befallen us; and we ſhould, without any further care and anxiety, uſing our own beſt diligence, and ſtudying to pleaſe him, chearfully leave ourſelves in his hands, with the greateſt confidence and ſecurity, that he will do all that for us which is really beſt; and with a firm perſuaſion, that that condition, and thoſe circumſtances of life, which he ſhall chuſe for us, will be no other but the very ſame which we would chuſe for ourſelves, if we were as wiſe as he.

And it is ſo natural for men to think thus of GOD, that the very heathen poet had the ſame idea of him, and upon that ground, adviſeth us to commit all our concernments to him.

Permittes ipſis expendere numinibus, quid
Conveniat nobis, rebuſque ſit utile noſtris;
Nam pro jucundis, aptiſſima quæque dabunt dii;
Charior eſt illis homo, quam ſibi.

Leave it, ſays he, to the wiſer gods, to conſider and determine what is fitteſt for thee, and moſt for thy advantage; and though they do not always give thee what thou deſireſt, and that which pleaſeth thee beſt, yet they will give that which is moſt fit and convenient for thee; for man is more dear to the gods, than he is to himſelf. Not much different from this is the divine counſel of Solomon, Prov. iii. 5, 6.

SERM. CXXXVIII. "Truſt in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean "not unto thine own underſtanding. In all thy "ways acknowledge him, and he ſhall direct thy "paths." It is conſiderable who it is that gives this advice; the "wiſeſt of the ſons of men;" and yet he adviſeth "to truſt in GOD for direction, and not "to lean to our own underſtandings."

If therefore we be fully perſuaded of GOD's infinitely wiſe and good providence, we ought certainly to refer ourſelves to him, and perfectly to acquieſce in his diſpoſal, and to reſt ſatisfied in whatever he does; and whatever condition he aſſigns to us, we ought to be contented with it: if we be not, we find fault with his wiſdom, and reproach his goodneſs, and wiſh the government of the world in better hands.

So that a firm belief of the providence of GOD, as it would take away all anxiety concerning future events, ſo would it likewiſe ſilence all thoſe murmurings and diſcontents, which are apt to ariſe in us, when things fall out croſs to our deſires, when diſaſters and diſappointments happen to us, and the providence of GOD caſts us into ſickneſs, or poverty, or diſgrace. This quieted David, when he was ready to break out into murmuring at the afflictions and calamities which befel him; "I held my peace, "(ſays he) and ſpake not a word, becauſe thou, "LORD, didſt it." And this likewiſe ſhould keep us from fretting and vexing at inſtruments and ſecond cauſes; to conſider that the wiſe providence of GOD over-ruleth and diſpoſeth the actions of men, and that no harm can happen to us without his permiſſion. This conſideration reſtrained David's anger, under that high provocation of Shimei, when he followed him, reproaching him and curſing him; "let him alone, the LORD hath ſaid unto him, curſe "David,"

" David." He conſidered that God's providence permitted it; and looking upon it as coming from an higher hand, this calmed his paſſion, and made him bear it patiently. If a man be walking in the ſtreet, and one fling water upon him, it is apt to provoke him beyond all patience; but no man is in a paſſion for being wet ten times as much by rain from heaven. What calamity ſoever befalleth us, when we conſider it as coming from heaven, and ordered and permitted there, this will ſtill and huſh our paſſion, and make us, with Eli, to hold our peace, or only to ſay, " it is the LORD, let him do what ſeemeth " him good." SERM. CXXXVIII.

We are, indeed, liable to many things in this world, which have a great deal of evil and affliction in them, to poverty, and pain, and reproach, and reſtraint, and the loſs of our friends and near relations; and theſe are great afflictions, and very croſs and diſtaſteful to us; and therefore, when we are in danger of any of theſe, and apprehend them to be making towards us, we are apt to be anxious, and full of trouble; and when they befall us, we are prone to cenſure the providence of GOD, and to judge raſhly concerning it, as if all things were not ordered by it for the beſt: but we ſhould conſider, that we are very ignorant and ſhort-ſighted creatures, and ſee but a little way before us, are not able to penetrate into the deſigns of GOD, and to look to the end of his providence. We cannot (as Solomon expreſſeth it) " ſee the works of GOD from the beginning to the " end;" whereas, if we ſaw the whole deſign of providence together, we ſhould ſtrangely admire the beauty and proportion of it, and ſhould ſee it to be very wiſe and good. And that which, upon the whole matter, and in the laſt iſſue and reſult of things,

is

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is moſt for our good, is certainly beſt, how grievous ſoever it may ſeem for the preſent. Sickneſs cauſed by phyſic, is, many times, more troubleſome for the preſent, than the diſeaſe we take it for; but every wiſe man compoſeth himſelf to bear it as well as he can, becauſe it is in order to his health: the evils and afflictions of this life are the phyſic, and means of cure, which the providence of God is often neceſſitated to make uſe of; and, if we did truſt ourſelves in the hands of this great phyſician, we ſhould quietly ſubmit to all the ſeverities of his providence, in confidence that they would "all work "together for our good."

When children are under the government of parents, or the diſcipline of their teachers, they are apt to murmur at them, and think it very hard to be denied ſo many things which they deſire, and to be conſtrained by ſeverities to a great many things which are grievous and tedious to them: but the parent and the maſter know very well, that it is their ignorance and inconſiderateneſs which makes them to think ſo, and that when they come to years, and to underſtand themſelves better, then they will acknowledge, that all that which gave them ſo much diſcontent was really for their good, and that it was their childiſhneſs and folly, which made them to think otherwiſe, and that they had, in all probability, been undone, had they been indulged in their humour, and permitted in every thing to have their own will; they had not wit and conſideration enough, to truſt the diſcretion of their parents and governors, and to believe that even thoſe things which were ſo diſpleaſing to them, would at laſt tend to their good.

There is a far greater diſtance between the wiſdom of God and men, and we are infinitely more

ignorant and childiſh in reſpect of God, than our children are in reſpect of us; and being perſuaded of this, we ought to reckon, that while we are in this world, under God's care and diſcipline, it is neceſſary for our good, that we be reſtrained in many things, which we eagerly deſire: and ſuffer many things that are grievous to us; and that when we come to heaven, and are grown up to be men, and "have put "away childiſh thoughts," and are come to underſtand things as they truly are, and not in a riddle, and darkneſs, as we do now; then "the judgment "of God will break forth as the light, and the righ- "teouſneſs" of all his dealings "as the noon day;" then all the riddles of providence will be clearly expounded to us, and we ſhall ſee a plain reaſon for all thoſe diſpenſations which were ſo much ſtumbled at, and acknowledge the great wiſdom and goodneſs of them. SERM. CXXXVIII.

You ſee then what reaſon there is to refer ourſelves to the providence of God, and "to caſt all our "care upon him," to truſt him with the adminiſtration and diſpoſal of all our concernments, and firmly to believe, that if we love God, and be careful to pleaſe him, every thing in the iſſue will turn to the beſt for us; and therefore we ſhould not anxiouſly trouble ourſelves about the events of things, but reſign up ourſelves to the good pleaſure of him, who diſpoſeth all things "according to the counſel of his "will," entirely truſting in his goodneſs, and in his fatherly care of us, and affection to us; that he will order all things for us, for the beſt, referring the ſucceſs of all our concernments to him, "in "whoſe hands are all the ways of the children of "men," chearfully ſubmitting to his determination, and the declarations of his providence, in every caſe.

And

SERM. CXXVIII. And this is a proper expreſſion of our confidence in GOD's wiſdom and goodneſs, to refer things to him before the event, and to ſay with the Chriſtians, Acts xxi. 14. "The will of the LORD be done;" becauſe this ſhews that we are perſuaded that GOD will do better for us, than our own counſel and choice; and to ſubmit to his will after the event, is likewiſe a great inſtance of our confidence in him, and that we believe that he hath done that which is beſt: for when GOD, by his providence, declares his will in any caſe, we ſhould look upon it as the ſentence of a wiſe and juſt judge, in which all parties concerned ought to acquieſce, and reſt fully ſatisfied.

And this may well be expected from us Chriſtians, who have much greater aſſurance of the particular providence of GOD, than the heathens had; and yet ſome of them were able to free themſelves from all trouble and anxiety, from murmuring and diſcontent. Upon this conſideration, Epictetus (as Arrian tells us) would expreſs himſelf thus; "I had always rather have that which happens; becauſe I eſteem "that better which GOD wills, than that which I "ſhould will." And again, "lift up thine eyes "(ſays he) with confidence to GOD, and ſay, "Henceforth, LORD, deal with me as thou pleaſeſt, "ὁμογνωμονῶ σοὶ ἴσθι εἰμὶ. I am of the ſame opi"nion with thee, juſt of the ſame mind that thou "art; I refuſe nothing that ſeems good to thee; "lead me where thou wilt; clothe me with what "garments thou pleaſeſt; ſet me in a public place, "or keep me in a private condition; continue me "in mine own country, or baniſh me from it; be"ſtow wealth upon me, or leave me to conflict and "ſtruggle with poverty, wh ch of theſe thou pleaſ-

"eſt,

ἐγὼ σοὶ ὑπὲρ ἁπάντων τούτων πρὸς ἀνθρώπους λογήσομαι. If men ſhall cenſure this provi- SERM. CXXXVIII.
ce towards me, and ſay, thou dealeſt hardly h me; I will apologiſe for thee, I will under- : and maintain thy cauſe, that what thou doſt eſt for me." What could a Chriſtian ſay or better, by way of reſignation of himſelf to ovidence of God? It almoſt tranſports me to ich paſſages from an heathen, eſpecially if we er in what condition Epictetus was; he had a d and deformed body, was in the extremity erty, a ſlave, and very cruelly and tyrannical- d, ſo that we can hardly imagine a man in and more wretched circumſtances; and yet he s the providence of God in all this, and not ubmits to his condition, but is contented with l embraces it; and ſince God hath thought ſt and beſt for him, he is of the ſame mind, inks ſo too. I confeſs, it doth not move me r Seneca, who flowed with wealth, and lived at o talk magnificently, and to ſlight poverty ain, as not worthy the name of evil and trou- ut to ſee this poor man, in the loweſt con- and worſt circumſtances of humanity, bear bravely, and with ſuch a chearfulneſs and ſe- of mind to entertain his hard fortune; and ot out of ſtupidity, but from a wiſe ſenſe of ovidence of God, and a firm perſuaſion of iſdom and goodneſs of all his dealings, this, an chuſe but be affected with it, as an admi- temper for a Chriſtian, much more for a hea- To which we may apply that ſaying of our , concerning the heathen centurion, "Verily ay unto you, I have not found ſo great faith, not in Iſrael;" ſo wiſe, ſo equal, ſo firm a temper

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temper of mind is ſeldom to be found, no, not amongſt Chriſtians. And this is the firſt conſideration, that if "GOD cares for us," we and our concernments are in the beſt and ſafeſt hands, and therefore we ſhould "caſt all our care upon GOD." The

2. Is, becauſe all our anxiety and care will do us no good; on the contrary, it will certainly do us hurt. We may fret and vex our own ſpirits, and make them reſtleſs, in the contemplation of the evils and diſappointments which we are afraid of, and may make our lives miſerable, in the ſad reflections of our own thoughts; but we cannot, by all our anxiety and care, controul the courſe of things, and alter the deſigns of providence; we cannot, by all our vexation and trouble, over-rule events, and make things happen as we would have them. And this is the argument our SAVIOUR uſeth to this very purpoſe, Mat. vi. 27. "Which of you by taking "thought can add one cubit to his ſtature?" So that all this trouble is unreaſonable, and to no purpoſe, becauſe it hath no influence on the event, either to promote or hinder it. Things are governed and diſpoſed by an higher hand, and placed out of our reach; we may deliberate, and contrive, and uſe our beſt endeavours for the effecting of our deſigns, but we cannot ſecure the event againſt a thouſand interpoſitions of divine providence, which we can neither foreſee, nor hinder; but yet, notwithſtanding, theſe our endeavours are reaſonable, becauſe they are the ordinary means which GOD hath appointed for the procuring of good, and prevention of evil; and though they may miſcarry, yet they are all we can do: but after this is done, trouble and anxiety about the event is the vaineſt thing in the world, becauſe it is to no purpoſe, nor doth at all conduce

conduce to what we desire; "we disquiet ourselves "in vain," and we distrust God's providence and care of us, and thereby provoke him to defeat and disappoint us. SERM. CXXXVIII.

Let us then, by these considerations, be persuaded to this duty, the practice whereof is of continual and universal use in the whole course of our lives; in all our affairs and concernments, after we have used our best endeavours, let us sit down and be satisfied, and refer the rest to God, whose providence governs the world, and takes care of all our interests, and of the interest of his church and religion, when they seem to be in greatest danger.

We cannot but be convinced that this is very reasonable, to leave the management of things to him who made them, and therefore understands best how to order them. The government of the world is a very curious and complicate thing, and not to be tampered with by every unskilful hand; and therefore, as an unskilful man, after he hath tampered a great while with a watch, thinking to bring it into better order, and is at last convinced that he can do no good upon it, carries it to him that made it, to mend it, and put it into order; so must we do, after all our care and anxiety about our own private concernments, or the public state of things, we must give over governing the world, as a business past our skill, as a province too hard, and "a know-"ledge too wonderful for us," and leave it to him, who made the world, to govern it, and take care of it.

And if we be not thus affected and disposed, we do not believe the providence of God, whatever profession we make of it; if we did, it would have an influence upon our minds, to free us from anxious care

SERM. CXXXVIII. care and diſcontent. Were we firmly perſuaded of the wiſdom and goodneſs of the divine providence, we ſhould confidently rely upon it, and according to the apoſtle's advice here in the text, "caſt all "our care upon him, becauſe he careth for us."

SERMON CXXXIX.

The wiſdom of GOD in the redemption of mankind.

1 COR. i. 24.

——CHRIST, *the power of* GOD, *and the wiſdom of* GOD.

SERM. CXXXIX. I Have, in the ordinary courſe of my preaching, been treating of the attributes and perfections of GOD, more particularly thoſe which relate to the divine underſtanding; the knowledge and wiſdom of GOD. The firſt of theſe I have finiſhed; and made ſome progreſs in the ſecond, the wiſdom of GOD: which I have ſpoken to in general, and have propounded more particularly to conſider thoſe famous inſtances and arguments of the divine wiſdom, in the creation of the world; the government of it; and the "redemption of mankind by JESUS CHRIST." The two firſt of theſe I have ſpoken to, namely, the wiſdom of GOD, which appears in the creation and government of the world. I come now to the

III. Inſtance of the divine wiſdom, "the redemp-"tion of mankind by JESUS CHRIST;" which I ſhall

ſhall, by GOD's aſſiſtance, ſpeak to from theſe words; SERM. CXXXIX.
"CHRIST the wiſdom of GOD."

The apoſtle, in the beginning of this epiſtle, upon occaſion of his mentioning the diviſions and parties that were among the Corinthians, where one ſaid, "I am of Paul;" another, "I am of Apollos;" aſks them, whether "Paul was crucified for them?" or, whether "they were baptized in the name of "Paul?" To convince them that they could not pretend this, that they were baptized into his name, he tells them, at the 14th and 15th verſes, that "he "had not ſo much as baptized any of them, except "two or three;" ſo far was he from having baptized them into his own name; and at the 17th verſe, he ſays, that his work, his principal work, was "to "preach the goſpel," which he had done, not with human eloquence, "not in wiſdom of words," but with great plainneſs and ſimplicity, "leſt the croſs of "CHRIST ſhould be made of none effect;" leſt, if he ſhould have uſed any artifice, the goſpel ſhould have been leſs powerful. And, indeed, his preaching was unaffectedly plain, and therefore the goſpel did ſeem to very many to be a fooliſh and ridiculous thing. The ſtory which they told of CHRIST crucified, was "to the Jews a ſtumbling-block, and to "the Greeks fooliſhneſs." The Jews, who expected another kind of Meſſias, that ſhould come in great pomp and glory, to be a mighty temporal prince, were angry at the ſtory of, "a crucified "CHRIST." The Greeks, the philoſophers, who expected ſome curious theories, adorned with eloquence, and delivered and laid down according to the exact rules of art, derided this plain and ſimple relation of CHRIST, and of the goſpel.

But though this deſign of the goſpel appeared ſil-

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ly and fooliſh to raſh and inconſiderate and prejudiced minds; yet "to them that are called," to them that do believe, "both Jews and Gentiles, CHRIST, "the power of GOD, and the wiſdom of GOD;" CHRIST, that is, the way of our redemption by JESUS CHRIST, which the apoſtle preached, "the "wiſdom of GOD," an eminent inſtance of it.

So that the "redemption of man by JESUS "CHRIST" is a deſign of admirable wiſdom. This I ſhall endeavour to confirm to you,

I. By general teſtimonies of ſcripture. And,

II. By a more particular inquiry into the nature of this deſign, and the means how it is accompliſhed.

I. By teſtimonies from ſcripture. You know I have all along, in my diſcourſes of the attributes of GOD, uſed this method of proving them, from the dictates of natural light, and the revelation of ſcripture: but now I muſt forſake my wonted method, for here the light of nature leaves me. The wiſdom of the creation is manifeſt in "the things "which are made; the heavens declare the glory "of GOD's wiſdom, and the firmament ſhews his "handy-work." The works of GOD do preach and ſet forth the wiſdom of the creator; but the ſun, moon, and ſtars, do not preach the goſpel. The wiſdom of redemption is "wiſdom in a myſtery, hid-"den wiſdom, which none of the princes or philoſo-"phers of this world knew." The ſharpeſt wits, and the higheſt and moſt raiſed underſtandings amongſt the heathens, could ſay nothing of this. Here "the "wiſdom of the wiſe," and "the underſtanding of "the prudent" is poſed, and we may make the apoſtle's challenge, ver. 20. of this chapter, "Where "is the wiſe? where is the diſputer of this world?" There is no natural light diſcovers CHRIST; the

wiſe

wiſe men cannot find him out, unleſs a ſtar be created on purpoſe to lead and direct to him. Therefore in this I ſhall only depend upon divine revelation. 1 Cor. ii. 7, 8. the goſpel is called "the wiſdom of "God in a myſtery, even the hidden wiſdom, "which God ordained before the world unto our "glory; which none of the princes of this world "knew." Eph. i. 7, 8. "In whom we have re-"demption through his blood, the forgiveneſs of "ſins, according to the riches of his grace, wherein "he hath abounded towards us in all wiſdom and "prudence. Eph. iii. 10, 11. "The manifold wiſdom "of God, according to the eternal purpoſe which "he purpoſed in CHRIST JESUS our LORD." This work of "our redemption by JESUS CHRIST" is ſo various and admirable, that it is not below the angels to know and underſtand it. "To the intent, "that unto principalities and powers in heavenly "places, might be known the manifold wiſdom of "God." SERM. CXXXIX.

II. By inquiring more particularly into the nature of this deſign, and the means how it is accompliſhed. This is wiſdom, to fit means to ends: and the more difficult the end, the greater wiſdom is required to find out ſuitable and ſufficient means for the accompliſhment of the end. Now "the wiſdom of "redemption" will appear, if we conſider the caſe of fallen man; and what fit, and proper, and ſuitable means the wiſdom of God hath deviſed for our recovery.

Firſt, let us conſider the caſe of fallen man, which was very ſad, both in reſpect of the miſery, and the difficulty of it.

1, In reſpect of the miſery of it. Man, who was made holy and upright by God, having by his voluntary

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luntary tranſgreſſion, and wilful diſobedience, fallen from him, did preſently ſink into a corrupt and degenerate, into a miſerable and curſed condition of which heaven and earth, and his own conſcience, bore him witneſs. Man being become a ſinner, is not only deprived of the image of GOD, but is liable to his juſtice; here was his miſery.

2. The difficulty of the caſe was this; man could not recover himſelf, and raiſe himſelf out of his own ruin; no creature was able to do it; ſo that our help is only in GOD; and, indeed, he is a merciful GOD, and doth not deſire our ruin, nor delight in our deſtruction: but ſuppoſe his mercy never ſo willing to ſave us, will not his holineſs, and juſtice, and truth, check thoſe forward inclinations of his goodneſs, and hinder all the deſigns of his mercy? Is not ſin contrary to the holy nature of GOD? hath not he declared his infinite hatred of it? hath not he threatned it with heavy and dreadful puniſhment? and ſaid, that "the ſinner ſhall die," that "he will "not acquit the guilty," nor "let ſin go unpuniſh-"ed?" Should he now, without any ſatisfaction to his offended juſtice, pardon the ſinner, remit his puniſhment, and receive him to favour; would this be agreeeble to his holineſs, and juſtice, and truth? would this become the wiſe governor of the world, who loves righteouſneſs, and order; who hates ſin, and is obliged, by the eſſential rectitude of his nature, to diſcountenance ſin?

So that here is a conflict of the attributes and perfections of GOD. The mercy of GOD pities our miſery, and would recover us, would open paradiſe to us: but there is a flaming ſword that keeps us out; the incenſed juſtice of GOD, that muſt be ſatisfied; and if he takes vengeance of us, we are eternally

nally ruined; if he ſpares us, how ſhall "mercy SERM.
"and juſtice meet together?" how ſhall GOD at CXXXIX.
once expreſs his love to the ſinner, and his hatred to ſin? here is the difficulty of our caſe.

II. Let us now enquire what means the wiſdom of GOD uſeth for our recovery. The wiſdom of GOD hath deviſed this expedient to accommodate all theſe difficulties, to reconcile the mercy and juſtice of GOD. The ſon of GOD ſhall undertake this work, and ſatisfy the offended juſtice of GOD, and repair the ruined nature of man. He ſhall bring GOD and man together, make up this gulph, and renew the commerce and correſpondence between GOD and us, which was broken off by ſin. The work that GOD deſigns is the redemption of man, that is, his recovery from a ſtate of ſin and eternal death, to a ſtate of holineſs and eternal life. The ſon of GOD is to engage in this deſign of our redemption, to ſatisfy the offended juſtice of GOD towards us, ſo as to purchaſe our deliverance from the wrath to come, and ſo as to reſtore us to the image and favour of GOD, that we may be ſanctified, and be made heirs of eternal life.

For opening of this, we will conſider,

1. The fitneſs of the perſon deſigned for this work.

2. The fitneſs of the means whereby he was to accompliſh it.

1. The fitneſs of the perſon deſigned for this work, and that was the eternal ſon of GOD; who, in reſpect of his infinite wiſdom and power, the dignity and credit of his perſon, his dearneſs to his father, and intereſt in him, was very fit to undertake this work, to mediate a reconciliation between GOD and man.

2. The fitneſs of the means whereby he was to accompliſh it; and theſe I ſhall refer to two heads, his

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humiliation, and exaltation. All the parts of theſe are very ſubſervient to the deſign of our redemption.

I. The humiliation of CHRIST, which conſiſts of three principal parts; his incarnation, his life, and his death.

1. His incarnation, which is ſet forth in ſcripture by ſeveral expreſſions; his being "made fleſh, and "dwelling among us," John i. 14. His being "made of the ſeed of David according to the fleſh," Rom. i. 3. His being "made of a woman," Gal. iv. 4. The "manifeſtation of GOD in the fleſh," 1 Tim. iii. 16. His "taking part of fleſh and blood," Heb. ii. 14. His "taking on him the ſeed of Abra-"ham," and "being made like unto his bre-"thren," Heb. ii. 16, 17. His "coming in the "fleſh," 1 John ii. 2. All which ſignifies his taking upon him human nature, and being really a man as well as GOD. The eternal ſon of GOD, in the fulneſs of time, took our nature; that is, aſſumed a real ſoul and body into union with the divine nature. Now this perſon, who was really both GOD and man, was admirably fitted for the work of our redemption.

In general, this made him a fit mediator, an equal and middle perſon to interpoſe in this difference, and take up this quarrel between GOD and man. Being both GOD and man, he was concerned for both parties, and intereſted both in the honour of GOD, and the happineſs of man, and engaged to be tender of both; and to procure the one, by ſuch ways as might be conſiſtent with the other.

More particularly, his inclination did fit him for thoſe two offices which he was to perform in his humiliation, of prophet and prieſt.

1. The office of prophet, to teach us both by his doctrine, and his life.

By his doctrine. His being in the likeneſs of man; this made him more familiar to us. He was "a "prophet raiſed up from among his brethren," as Moſes ſpake, and he makes this an argument why we ſhould hear him. Should GOD ſpeak to us immediately by himſelf, we "could not hear him, and "live." GOD condeſcends to us, and complies with the weakneſs of our nature, and "raiſeth up a pro-"phet from among our brethren;" we ſhould hear him. And then his being GOD, did add credit and authority to what he ſpake; he could confirm the doctrine which he taught by miracles. Of his teaching us by his life, I ſhall have occaſion to ſpeak preſently. SERM. CXXXIX.

2. For the office of prieſt. He was fit to be our prieſt, becauſe "he was taken from among "men," as the apoſtle ſpeaks; fit to ſuffer, as being man, having "a body prepared," as it is Heb. x. 5. and fit to ſatisfy by his ſufferings for the ſins of all men, as being GOD, which put an infinite dignity and value upon them; the ſufferings of an infinite perſon, being equal to the offences done againſt an infinite GOD: and thus the mercy of GOD is exalted without the diminution of his juſtice.

And as this incarnation did qualify him for ſuffering, ſo for compaſſion, and fellow-ſuffering with us, Heb. ii. 17, 18. "Wherefore in all things it behov-"ed him to be made like unto his brethren, that he "might be a merciful and faithful high-prieſt, in "things pertaining to GOD, to make reconciliation "for the ſins of the people; for in that he himſelf "hath ſuffered, being tempted, he is able to ſuc-"cour them that are tempted."

2. His life was a means admirably fitted to bring men to holineſs and goodneſs. I might go through

SERM. CXXXIX. all the parts of it, but becauſe I intend to be very ſhort upon theſe heads, I ſhall only take notice of that part of his life, which was ſpent in his publick miniſtry; "he went about doing good;" the doctrine that he preached was calculated for the deſtroying of ſin, and the promoting of holineſs; the great end and deſign of it was to advance righteouſneſs, and goodneſs, and humility, and patience, and ſelf-denial; to make us mortify our ſenſual deſires, and brutiſh paſſions, to contemn and renounce this preſent world; and this being the deſign of it, it was a moſt proper engine to demoliſh the works of the devil: and to make way for the entertainment of his doctrine, the whole frame of his life, and all the circumſtances of it, did contribute. His life was the practice of his doctrine, and a clear comment upon it. The meanneſs of his condition in the world, that he had no ſhare of the poſſeſſions of it, were a great advantage to his doctrine of ſelf-denial, and contempt of the world. "The captain of our ſalvation," that he might draw off our affections from the world, and ſhew us how little the things of it are to be valued, would himſelf have no ſhare in it, Mat. viii. 20. "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air "have nefts, but the ſon of man hath not where to "lay his head." The mean circumſtances of his condition were very eminently for the advantage of his deſign; for had he not been ſtript of all worldly accommodations, he could not have been ſo free from ſuſpicion of a worldly intereſt and deſign; nay he could not have been ſo conſiderable; he was really greater for his meanneſs. The very heathens did account this true greatneſs (as we find in Ariſtotle) not to admire the pleaſures, and greatneſs, and pomp, of the world. And that his meanneſs might be no diſadvantage

diſadvantage to him, thoſe evidences that he gave of his divinity in the wonderful things that he did, rendered him conſiderable, and gained more reverence and authority to his doctrine, than his meanneſs could bring contempt upon it. SERM. CXXXIX.

Beſides, the manner of his converſation was a very great advantage to him; he was of a very ſweet and converſable and obliging temper; and by this means he did gain upon the people, and was acceptable to them; and thus he did apply himſelf to them in the moſt humane ways, to make way for the entertainment of his doctrine. The miracles that he wrought did confirm his doctrine beyond all exception, as being a divine teſtimony, and ſetting a ſeal of GOD to the truth of it; yet becauſe many were blinded with prejudice, and though they did ſee, yet would not ſee, CHRIST "the wiſdom of GOD" did ſo order the buſineſs of his miracles, as to make them humane ways of winning upon them, for they were generally ſuch as were beneficial; "he healed "all manner of diſeaſes" and maladies by his miraculous power; and ſo his miracles did not only tend to confirm his doctrine, as they were miracles, but to make way for the entertainment of it, as they were benefits; this was a ſenſible demonſtration to them that he intended them good, becauſe he did them good; they would eaſily believe, that he, who healed their bodies, would not harm their ſouls. This for his life.

III. His death, which was the loweſt ſtep of his humiliation, and the conſummation of his ſufferings. Now the death of CHRIST did eminently contribute to this deſign of our redemption. The death of CHRIST did not only expiate the guilt of ſin, and pacify conſcience, by making plenary ſatisfaction to the

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the divine juſtice; but did eminently contribute to the killing of ſin in us: Rom. vi. 6. "Knowing "this, that our old man is crucified with him, that "the body of ſin might be deſtroyed, that hence- "forth we might not ſerve ſin." Rom. viii. 3. "GOD ſending his own ſon in the likeneſs of ſinful "fleſh, and for ſin" (that is, by being a ſacrifice for ſin) "condemned ſin in the fleſh." The death of CHRIST convinceth ſin to be a great evil; and doth condemn it, becauſe the impartial juſtice of GOD did ſo ſeverely puniſh it in his own ſon, when he appeared in the perſon of a ſinner; and this is the moſt powerful argument to us to crucify ſin, that is crucified our SAVIOUR. That ſo innocent and holy a perſon ſhould ſuffer ſo cruel and ignominious a death for our ſins, ſhould ſet us for ever againſt it and make us hate it with a perfect hatred.

The circumſtances of CHRIST's ſufferings are with admirable wiſdom fitted for the conquering of ſin and Satan. Sin came by the woman: the ſeed of the woman ſuffers for ſin; and by ſuffering, conquers it. Sin began in the garden; and there our SAVIOUR began his ſufferings for ſin. Sin came by the tree; and CHRIST bears the curſe of it in hanging upon the tree, and crucifies it by his croſs.

And as he conquered ſin, ſo he overcame Satan by his own arts. The devil found Chriſt in the likeneſs of a man, he judged him mortal, and his great deſign was to procure his death, and get him into his grave. CHRIST permits him to bring about his deſign: he lets him enter into Judas; he lets the Jews crucify, and put him into his grave, and roll a great ſtone upon it: but here his divine wiſdom appears, in ruining the devil by his own deſign, and ſnaring him in the works of his own hands;

Het

Heb. ii. 14. "By death he deſtroys him that had "the power of death, that is, the devil." SERM. CXXXIX.

I know the ſufferings of CHRIST were, by the "wiſe of the world," made the great objection againſt the wiſdom of this diſpenſation; the "croſs "of CHRIST was to the Greeks fooliſhneſs;" and yet the wiſeſt of them had determined otherwiſe in general, though not in this particular caſe. Plato (in the ſecond book of his commonwealth) ſaith, "That if a man may be a perfect pattern of juſtice "and righteouſneſs, and be approved by GOD and "men, he muſt be ſtript of all the things of this "world; he muſt be poor and diſgraced, and be "accounted a wicked and unjuſt man, he muſt be "whipt, and tormented, and crucified as a male-"factor;" which is, as it were, a prophetical deſcription of our SAVIOUR's ſufferings. And Arrian, in his epiſtle, deſcribing a man fit to reform the world, whom he calls "the apoſtle, the meſſenger, "the preacher, and miniſter of GOD, ſaith, he muſt "be without houſe and harbour, and worldly accom-"modations; muſt be armed with ſuch patience for "the greateſt ſufferings, as if he were a ſtone, and "devoid of ſenſe; he muſt be a ſpectacle of miſery "and contempt to the world." So that by the acknowledgment of theſe two wiſe heathens, there was nothing in the ſufferings of CHRIST that was unbecoming the wiſdom of GOD, and improper to the end and deſign of CHRIST's coming into the world; beſides, that they ſerved a further end, which they did not dream of, "the ſatisfying of divine juſtice."

Secondly, His exaltation. The ſeveral parts of which, his reſurrection, and aſcenſion, and "ſitting "at the right hand of GOD," were eminently ſubſervient to the perfecting and carrying on of this deſign.

The

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The reſurrection of CHRIST is the great confirmation of the truth of all that he delivered, Rom. i. 4. "declared to be the ſon of GOD with power, "ὁρισθέντος υἱῦ Θεῦ ἐν δυνάμει, by the reſurrection "from the dead." This great miracle of his reſurrection from the dead did determine the controverſy, and put it out of all doubt and queſtion, that he was "the ſon of GOD." And then his aſcenſion, and "ſitting at the right hand of GOD," this gives us the aſſurance of a bleſſed immortality, and is a demonſtration of a life to come, and a pledge of everlaſting glory and happineſs. And can any thing tend more to the encouragement of obedience, and to make us dead to the pleaſures and enjoyments of this life, than the aſſurance of eternal life and happineſs?

And then the conſequents of his exaltation, they do eminently conduce to our recovery. The ſending of the Holy Ghoſt "to lead us into all truth," to ſanctify us, to aſſiſt us, and to comfort us under the greateſt troubles and afflictions; and the powerful interceſſion of CHRIST in our behalf; and his return to judgment; the expectation whereof is the great argument to repentance, and holineſs of life: Acts xvii. 30, 31. "And the times of this ignorance GOD winked at, but now commandeth all "men every where to repent: becauſe he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the "world in righteouſneſs, by that man whom he hath "ordained; whereof he hath given aſſurance unto "all men, in that he hath raiſed him from the dead." And thus I have endeavoured to prove, that the "redemption of man by JESUS CHRIST" is a deſign of admirable wiſdom.

The uſe I ſhall make of it, is to convince us of

the unreaſonableneſs of unbelief, and the folly and madneſs of impenitency. SERM. CXXXIX.

Firſt, The unreaſonableneſs of unbelief. The goſpel reveals to us the wiſe counſel and diſpenſation of GOD for our redemption; and thoſe who diſbelieve the goſpel, "they reject the counſel of GOD "againſt themſelves," as it is ſaid of the unbelieving Phariſees and lawyers, Luke vii. 30. The goſpel reveals to us a deſign ſo reaſonable and full of wiſdom, that they who can diſbelieve it are deſperate perſons, devoted to ruin. 1 Cor. i. 18. "The "croſs of CHRIST is to them that periſh fooliſh-"neſs." 2 Cor. iv. 3, 4. "But if our goſpel be "hid, it is hid to them that are loſt; in whom the "GOD of this world hath blinded the eyes of them "that believe not, leſt the light of the glorious goſ-"pel of CHRIST, who is the image of GOD, ſhould "ſhine unto them." The goſpel carries ſo much light and evidence in it, that it cannot be hid from any but ſuch whoſe eyes are blinded by the devil and their luſts.

He that will duly weigh and conſider things, and look narrowly into this wiſe diſpenſation of GOD, ſhall find nothing to object againſt it; nay, ſhall diſcover in it the greateſt motives and inducements to believe. We are apt to believe any thing that is reaſonable, eſpecially if it be for our advantage. Now this wiſe diſpenſation of GOD is not only reaſonable in itſelf, but beneficial to us; it does at once highly gratify our underſtandings, and ſatisfy our intereſt; why ſhould we not then believe and entertain it?

I. The deſign of the goſpel is reaſonable, and gratifies our underſtandings. And in this reſpect the goſpel hath incomparable advantages above any other religion.

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religion. The end of all religion is to advance piety and holineſs, and real goodneſs among men: and the more any religion advanceth theſe, the more reaſonable it is. Now the great incitements and arguments to piety, are the excellency and perfection of the divine nature; fear of puniſhment and hopes of pardon and rewards. Now the goſpel repreſents all theſe to the greateſt advantage.

1. It repreſents the perfections of GOD to the greateſt advantage, eſpecially thoſe which tend moſt to the promotion of piety, and the love of GOD in us; his juſtice and mercy.

(1.) His juſtice. The goſpel repreſents it inflexible in its rights, and inexorable, and that will not in any caſe let ſin go unpuniſhed. The impartiality of the divine juſtice appears in this diſpenſation, that when GOD pardons the ſinner, yet he will puniſh ſin ſo ſeverely in his own ſon, who was the ſurety. Now what could more tend to diſcountenance ſin, and convince us of the great evil of it?

(2.) His mercy. This diſpenſation is a great demonſtration of the mercy, and goodneſs, and love of GOD, in ſending his ſon to die for ſinners, and in ſaving us by devoting and ſacrificing him, John iii. 16. "For GOD ſo loved the world, that he gave "his only begotten ſon." Rom. v. 8. "But GOD "commendeth his love towards us, in that while "we were yet ſinners, CHRIST died for us." 1 John iv. 9, 10. "In this was manifeſted the love of GOD "towards us, becauſe GOD ſent his only begotten "ſon into the world, that we might live through "him. Herein is love; not that we loved GOD, "but that he loved us, and ſent his ſon to be the "propitiation for our ſins." Now this repreſentation of GOD's mercy and love which the goſpel makes,

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is of great force and efficacy to melt our hearts into love to GOD. SERM. CXXXIX.

2. The ſecond argument to piety is fear of puniſhment. The goſpel hath revealed to us the miſery of thoſe who continue in their ſin; it hath made clear and terrible diſcoveries of thoſe torments which attend ſinners in another world, and hath opened to us the treaſures of GOD's wrath; ſo that now under the goſpel, "hell is naked before us, and deſtruction "hath no covering;" and this is one thing which makes the goſpel ſo powerful an engine to deſtroy ſin, Rom. i. 16, 18. "The goſpel is the power of "GOD unto ſalvation; for therein is the wrath of "GOD revealed from heaven againſt all ungodli-"neſs, and unrighteouſneſs of men."

3. Hopes of pardon and reward. And this, added to the former, renders the goſpel the moſt powerful inſtrument to take men off from ſin, and engage them to holineſs, that can be imagined. The means to draw men from ſin, when they are once awakened with the fear of vengeance, is hopes of pardon and mercy; and the way to incourage obedience for the future, is hope of reward. Now as an argument to us to retreat and draw back from ſin, the goſpel promiſes pardon and indemnity to us; and as an incitement to holineſs, the goſpel opens heaven to us, and ſets before us everlaſting glory and happineſs, and gives us the greateſt aſſurance of it.

This is the firſt, the deſign of the goſpel is reaſonable, in that it does eminently and directly ſerve for the ends of piety and religion.

II. This diſpenſation of GOD is beneficial to us; and ſatisfies our intereſt; and this adds to the unreaſonableneſs of our unbelief, this deſign of GOD being

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being not only reaſonable in itſelf, but deſirable t us, that it ſhould be ſo; becauſe of the eminent ad vantages that redound to us by it. The deſign of th goſpel is to deliver us from the guilt and dominio of ſin, and the tyranny of Satan; to reſtore us to th image and favour of GOD: and by making us pa takers of a divine nature, to bring us to eternal lif And is there any thing of real advantage which not comprehended in this? Is it not deſirable to ever man, that there ſhould be a way whereby our guilt conſciences may be quieted and appeaſed; whereb we may be delivered from the fear of death and hell Is it not deſirable to be freed from the ſlavery o our luſts, and reſcued from the tyranny and pow of the great deſtroyer of ſouls? Is it not deſirable t be like GOD, and to be aſſured of his love and fa vour, who is the beſt friend, and the moſt dangr rous enemy; and to be ſecured, that when we leav this world, we ſhall be unſpeakably happy for ever Now the goſpel conveys theſe benefits to us; an if this be the caſe of the goſpel, and there be no thing in this deſign of our redemption, but what wiſe and reaſonable, and exceedingly for our benef and advantage; why ſhould any man be ſo averſe t the belief of it? Why ſhould unbelief be counted piece of wit? Is it wit to ſet ourſelves againſt reaſo and to oppoſe our beſt intereſt? It is wickednes and prejudice, and inconſiderateneſs which diſbeliev the goſpel. Thoſe who do conſider things welcom this good news, and embrace theſe glad tiding "Wiſdom is juſtified of her children." To the who are truly ſenſible of their own intereſt, and wil ing to accept of reaſonable evidence, this is not o ly "a true ſaying," but "worthy of all accept "tion; that CHRIST came into the world to ſa "ſinners."

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Secondly, this doth convince men of the madneſs and folly of impenitency. Now ſince the wiſdom of GOD hath contrived ſuch a way of our recovery, and by the declaration of GOD's wrath, and diſpleaſure againſt ſin, hath given us ſuch arguments to repentance, and by diſcovering a way of pardon and mercy, hath given us ſuch encouragement to repentance, how great muſt the folly of impenitency be? For conſider, SERM. CXXXIX.

1. That impenitency directly ſets itſelf againſt the "wiſdom of God." If after all this we continue in our ſins, "we reject the counſel of GOD againſt "ourſelves," we deſpiſe the wiſdom of GOD, and charge that with folly: and we do it againſt ourſelves, to our own injury and ruin. If we live in our ſins, and cheriſh our luſts, we directly oppoſe the end of our redemption, we contradict the great deſign of the goſpel, we contemn the admirable contrivance of GOD's wiſdom, who ſent his ſon into the world on purpoſe to deſtroy ſin; for we uphold that which he came to deſtroy: 1 John iii. 5. "Ye "know that he was manifeſted to take away our "ſins." Now ſhall we continue in ſin, when we know "the ſon of GOD was manifeſted to take away "ſin?" GOD cannot but take it very ill at our hands, when he hath laid out "the riches of his "wiſdom" in this deſign, for us to go about to defeat him in it; this is at once to be unthankful to GOD, and injurious to ourſelves; it is ſuch a madneſs, as if a condemned man ſhould deſpiſe a pardon; as if a priſoner ſhould be fond of his fetters, and refuſe deliverance; as if a man deſperately ſick ſhould fight with his phyſician, and put away health from him. If we do not comply with the "wiſdom "of GOD," who hath contrived our recovery;

SERM. CXXXIX. " we forſake our own mercy, and neglect a gr
" ſalvation; we love death, and hate our own ſoul
Prov. viii. 14, 15, 16.

2. Conſider, we cannot expect " the wiſdom
" God" ſhall do more for our recovery, than h
been already done; " the wiſdom of God" will
try any further means. Mat. xxi. 37. " laſt of
" he ſent his ſon." If we deſpiſe this way, if
" tread under foot the ſon of God, and count
" blood of the covenant, whereby we are ſanctifi
" an unholy thing, there will remain no more ſac
" fice for ſin," Heb. x. 26, 29. What can expi
the guilt of ſin, if the blood of Christ do no
What ſhall take us off from ſin, what ſhall ſanct
us, if " the blood of the covenant" be ineffectua
We reſiſt our laſt remedy, and make void the b
means the wiſdom of God could deviſe for our
covery, if, after the revelation of the goſpel, we cc
tinue in our ſins.

3. If we fruſtrate this deſign of God's wiſdc
for our recovery, our ruin will be the more drea
ful and certain. Impenitency under the goſpel w
increaſe our miſery. " If Christ had not con
" we had had no ſin," in compariſon of what
now have; " but now our ſin remains, and there
" no cloak for our ſin," προφασιν ουκ εχουσιν. V
ſhall not be able at the day of judgment to prefa
any thing by way of excuſe or apology for our i
penitency. What ſhall we be able to ſay to the ju
tice of God, when that ſhall condemn us, who
jected his wiſdom, which would have ſaved us? V
would all be ſaved, but we would be ſaved witho
repentance: now " the wiſdom of God" hath n
found out any other way to ſave us from hell, b
by ſaving us from our ſins. And thou that wilt n

ſubmit to this method of divine wiſdom, take thy courſe, and let us ſee "how thou wilt eſcape the "damnation of hell." I will conclude all with thoſe dreadful words which "the wiſdom of GOD" pronounceth againſt thoſe that deſpiſe her, and refuſe to hearken to her voice, Prov. i. 24, 25, 26. "Becauſe I have called, and ye refuſed, I have "ſtretched out my hand, and no man regarded; "but ye have ſet at naught my counſel, and would "none of my reproof: I alſo will laugh at your ca-"lamity, I will mock when your fear cometh." They who will not comply with the counſel of GOD for their happineſs, they ſhall inherit the condition which they have choſen to themſelves; "they ſhall "eat the fruit of their own ways, and be filled with "their own devices." SERM. CXXXIX.

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The juſtice of GOD in the diſtribution of rewards and puniſhments.

GEN. xviii. 25.

Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?

IN treating of the attributes of GOD, I have conſidered thoſe which relate to the divine underſtanding, viz. knowledge and wiſdom; I come now to conſider thoſe which relate to the divine will, viz. theſe four, the juſtice, the truth, the goodneſs, and the holineſs of GOD. I begin with the firſt, namely, the juſtice of GOD. SERM. CXL.

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At the 17th verſe of this chapter, GOD by a great and wonderful condeſcention of his goodneſs, reveals to Abraham his intention concerning the deſtruction of Sodom; upon this Abraham, v. 23. interceded with GOD for ſaving of the righteous perſons that were there; and to this end, he pleads with GOD his juſtice and righteouſneſs, with which he apprehended it to be inconſiſtent "to deſtroy the righteous "with the wicked," which, without a miracle, could not be avoided in a general deſtruction. "Wilt "thou alſo deſtroy the righteous with the wicked? "Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the "city, wilt thou alſo deſtroy, and not ſpare the "place for the fifty righteous that are therein? "that be far from thee to do after this manner, to "ſlay the righteous with the wicked, and that the "righteous ſhould be as the wicked, that be far "from thee; ſhall not the judge of all the earth "do right?" This negative interrogation is equivalent to a vehement affirmation, "ſhall not the "judge of all the earth do right?" that is, undoubtedly he will. This we may take for a certain and undoubted principle, that in the diſtribution of rewards and puniſhments, the judge of the world will do righteouſly.

So that the argument that lies under our conſideration, is the juſtice of GOD in the diſtribution of rewards and puniſhments: for the clearing of which, we will conſider it,

Firſt, in hypotheſi, in regard to the particular caſe which is here put by Abraham in the text.

Secondly, in theſi, we will conſider it in general, in the diſtribution of rewards and puniſhments.

Firſt, we will conſider it in hypotheſi, in regard to the particular caſe which is here put by Abraham in

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in the text; and the rather, becauſe if we look well into it, there is ſomething of real difficulty in it, not eaſy to be cleared; for Abraham's reaſoning, if it be true, does plainly conclude, that it would have been unrighteous with God in the deſtruction of Sodom, not to make a difference between the righteous and the wicked, but to involve them equally in the ſame common deſtruction. "That be far "from thee to do after this manner, to ſlay the "righteous with the wicked, and that the righteous "ſhould be as the wicked, that be far from thee, "ſhall not the judge of all the earth do right?" as if he had ſaid, "ſurely the judge of all the earth "will never do ſo unrighteous a thing."

And yet notwithſtanding this, we ſee it is very uſual for the providence of God to involve good men in general calamities, and to make no viſible difference between the righteous and the wicked. Now the difficulty is, how to reconcile theſe appearances of providence with this reaſoning of Abraham in the text.

And for doing of this, I ſee but one poſſible way, and that is this, that Abraham does not here ſpeak concerning the judgments of God which befall men in the ordinary courſe of his providence, which many times happen promiſcuouſly, and involve good and bad men in the ſame ruin; and the reaſon hereof is plain, becauſe God in his ordinary providence does permit the cauſes, which produce theſe judgments, to act according to their own nature, and they either cannot or will not make any diſtinction; for the calamities which ordinarily happen in the world, are produced by two ſorts of cauſes, either thoſe which we call natural, or thoſe which are voluntary. Natural cauſes, ſuch as wind, and thunder,

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and ſtorms, and the infection of the air, and th like; theſe acting by a neceſſity of nature, witho any knowledge or choice, can make no diſtinctio between the good and the bad. And the voluntar cauſes of calamities, as men are, they many time will make no difference between the righteous an the wicked; nay, many times they are maliciou bent againſt the righteous, and the effects of the malice fall heavieſt upon them. Now we ſay th things happen in the way of ordinary providenc when natural cauſes are permitted to act according their nature, and voluntary cauſes are left to th liberty; and therefore in the courſe of ordinary pr vidence, it is not to be expected that ſuch a diſtin tion ſhould be made; it is neither poſſible, nor de juſtice require it; it is not poſſible, ſuppoſing nat ral cauſes left to act according to their nature, an voluntary cauſes to be left to their liberty; nor de juſtice require it, for every man is ſo much a ſinne that no evil that befalls him in this world, can ſaid to be unjuſt in reſpect of GOD.

So that Abraham is not here to be underſtood, ſpeaking of ſuch judgments as befal men in the ord nary courſe of GOD's providence, in which, if t good and bad be involved alike, it cannot be expe ed to be otherwiſe, nor is there any injuſtice in i but Abraham here ſpeaks of miraculous and extra dinary judgments, which are immediately inflict by GOD for the puniſhment of ſome crying ſins, an the example of the world, to deter others from t like. And ſuch was this judgment, which GOD i tended to bring upon Sodom, and which Abrah hath relation to in this diſcourſe of his. In this c it may be expected from the juſtice of GOD, that difference ſhould be made between the righteous a the wicked; and that for theſe reaſons:

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1. Because this is a judgment which GOD himself executes. It is not an event of common providence, which always follows the nature of its cause, but an act of GOD, as a judge. Now it is essential to a judge to make a discrimination between the good and the bad, so as to punish the one, and spare the other; and this is as necessary to all proper acts of judgment in this world, as the other; there being no other difference between them, but that one is a particular judgment, and the other the general judgment of the whole world.

2. When GOD goes out of the way of his ordinary providence in punishing, it may reasonably be expected that he should make a difference between the good and the bad; for the reason why he does not in his common providence is, because he will not break and interrupt the established order of things upon every little occasion: but when he does go besides the common course of things in punishing, the reason ceaseth, which hindered him before from making a difference; and it is reasonable enough to expect, that in the inflicting of a miraculous judgment, a miraculous difference should be made. Without making this difference, the end of these miraculous judgments would not be attained, which is, remarkably to punish the crying sins of men, and by that example to deter others from the like sins: but if these judgments should fall promiscuously upon the righteous and the wicked, it would not be evident, that they were designed for the punishment of such sins, when men did see, that they fell likewise upon those who were not guilty of those sins, and consequently the example could not be so effectual to deter men from sin.

Upon all these accounts you see that Abraham's

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reaſoning was very ſtrong and well grounded, a
thoſe judgments which are miraculous and extra
dinary, and immediately inflicted by God, for
puniſhment of great and heinous ſins, which was
caſe he was ſpeaking of. And accordingly we fi
that in thoſe judgments which have been immedi
ly and miraculouſly inflicted by God, he hath alw
made this difference between the righteous and
wicked. In the deluge which he brought upon
old world, the ſpirit of God gives this reaſon w
the judgment was ſo univerſal, becauſe "all f
"had corrupted his way upon the earth;" a
the reaſon why he ſaved Noah and his family w
becauſe in this general corruption of mankind
alone was righteous; "thee have I ſeen righteous
"fore me in this generation." So likewiſe in t
miraculous judgment of Korah and his compa
when "God made a new thing, and the earth op
"ed her mouth to ſwallow them up," none
riſhed but he and his complices; the reſt had wa
ing given them by God to "remove from the te
"of thoſe wicked men." Thus you ſee that as
the particular caſe in this text, Abraham's reaſon
concerning the juſtice of God is very firm, and c
cluding. I proceed to the

Second thing, which was that which I principa
intended to diſcourſe upon, viz. to conſider the j
tice of God in general, in the diſtribution of rewa
and puniſhments. And here I cannot but gra
that the beſt evidence of this is yet wanting.
have clear demonſtrations of the power, and wiſdc
and goodneſs of God in this vaſt and admirable fra
of things which we ſee; but we muſt ſtay till
day of judgment for a clear and full manifeſtatio
the divine juſtice; for which reaſon the day of ju

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ment is in ſcripture called, "the day of the revelation "of the righteous judgment of GOD." But in the mean time we may receive ſufficient aſſurance of this, both from natural reaſon, and from divine revelation.

1. From natural reaſon, which tells us, that "GOD loves righteouſneſs," and "hates iniquity," and conſequently that it muſt be agreeable to his nature, to countenance and encourage the one, and to diſcountenance the other; that is, to give ſome publick teſtimony of his liking and affection to the one, and of his hatred and diſlike of the other; which cannot otherwiſe be done, but by rewards and puniſhments.

But however the heathen reaſoned about this matter, whatever premiſes they laid, they firmly believed the concluſion, that GOD is juſt. Plato lays down this as a certain and undoubted principle, "That "GOD is in no wiſe unjuſt, but as righteous as is "poſſible; and that we cannot reſemble GOD more, "than in this quality and diſpoſition." So likewiſe Seneca tells us, "That the GODS are neither capa-"ble of receiving an injury, nor of doing any thing "that is unjuſt." Antoninus the great emperor and philoſopher, ſpeaking doubtfully whether good men are extinguiſhed by death, or remain afterwards; "If it be juſt, ſays he, you may be ſure it "is ſo; if it be not juſt, you may certainly conclude "the contrary; for GOD is juſt, and being ſo, he "will do nothing that is unjuſt or unreaſonable." And indeed the heathen philoſophers looked upon this as the great ſanction of all moral precepts, that GOD was the witneſs and the avenger of the breach and violation of them, *Qui ſecus faxit, Deus ipſe vindex erit*; "If any man do contrary to them, GOD "himſelf will puniſh it;" which ſhews, that there

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is a natural awe upon the minds of men of the divine juſtice, which will overtake offenders either in this world or the other. But this will more clearly appear in the

2. Place, from ſcripture, or divine revelation. And thoſe texts which I ſhall produce to this purpoſe, may be reduced to theſe two heads; either ſuch as prove the rectitude of the divine nature and his juſtice in general; or ſuch as ſpeak more particularly of the juſtice and equity of his providence in the diſtributions of rewards and puniſhments. I begin, firſt, with thoſe which declare the rectitude of the divine nature, and the juſtice of GOD in general, and that either by attributing this perfection to him, or by removing the contrary, injuſtice and unrighteouſneſs, at the greateſt diſtance from him.

1. Thoſe which attribute this perfection to GOD I ſhall mention but a few of many, Pſal. cxxix. 4 "The LORD is righteous." Dan. ix. 7. "O LORD "righteouſneſs belongeth unto thee." This good men have acknowledged, when they have lain under the hand of GOD, Ezra ix. 15. "O LORD GOD of "Iſrael, thou art righteous." And this the worſt of men have been forced to own, when they have been in extremity, Ex. ix. 27. then Pharaoh ſaid "the LORD is righteous." This hath been likewiſe acknowledged by thoſe who have lain under the greateſt temptation to doubt of it, Jer. xii. "righteous art thou, O LORD, when I plead with "thee: yea, let me talk with thee of thy judgments "wherefore doth the way of the wicked proſper? The prophet, notwithſtanding he ſaw the proſperous condition of wicked men, and the afflicted ſtate of the godly, which ſeemed hard to be reconciled with the juſtice of GOD's providence: yet before he would

so much as reason about it, he lays down this as a certain conclusion, "righteous art thou, O LORD." To this head likewise belong all those texts which speak of righteousness, as GOD's dwelling place, and his throne, of his delight in justice, and of the duration and eternity of it, which I need not particularly recite. SERM. CXL.

2. There are likewise other texts, which remove the contrary, viz. injustice and unrighteousness, at the greatest distance from GOD, as being most contrary to his nature and perfection. Deut. xxxii. 4. "A GOD of truth, and without iniquity." 2 Chron. xix. 7. "There is no iniquity with the LORD our "GOD, nor accepting of persons, nor taking of "gifts." Job viii. 3. "Doth GOD pervert judg- "ment? or doth the Almighty pervert justice?" which is a vehement negation of the thing. Job xxxiv. 10, 11, 12. "Far be it from GOD, that he "should do wickedness, and from the Almighty, "that he should commit iniquity. For the work "of a man shall he render unto him, and cause "every man to find according to his ways. Yea, "surely GOD will not do wickedly, neither will the "Almighty pervert judgment." Rom. ix. 14. "What shall we say then? is there unrighteousness "with GOD? GOD forbid."

Secondly, there are other texts which speak more particularly of the justice and righteousness of GOD in the distribution of rewards and punishments. It is true indeed, the justice of GOD doth not constantly appear in this world in the dispensations of his providence, because this is a time of patience and forbearance to sinners, and of trial and exercise to good men; but there is a day a coming, when all things shall be set strait, and every man shall receive the just

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juſt reward of his deeds, when the juſtice of Go ſhall be evident to all the world, and every eye ſha ſee it, and ſhall acknowledge the righteous judg ment of GOD; and this the ſcripture moſt clearl and expreſly declares unto us; and hence it is, tha the day of judgment is called "the day of the reve "lation of the righteous judgment of GOD." Th righteouſneſs of GOD doth not now ſo clearly appea but that there are many clouds over it; but the ſhall be a day of revelation, when the righteouſne of GOD ſhall be made manifeſt to all the world.

The remunerative juſtice of GOD ſhall then appe in the rewarding the righteous; and the punitiv juſtice of GOD in puniſhing the w cked and ungodl "ſo that a man ſhall ſay, verily there is a rewar "for the righteous, verily there is a GOD that judg "eth the world."

Now the righteouſneſs of this vengeance of Go which GOD will take upon ſinners, is further ſ forth to us in ſcripture, from the equity and impa tiality of it.

I. From the equity of it.

1. In that the ſins of men have juſtly deſerved th puniſhment, that ſhall come upon them, Rom. 32. "Who knowing the judgment of GOD, δικαίω "μα τῦ θεῦ, the righteous judgment of GOD, tha "they which commit ſuch things, are worthy "death."

2. In that the judgment of GOD ſhall be propo tioned to the degree and heinouſneſs of mens ſin ſo as the leſſer or greater ſins ſhall be puniſhed wit more or leſs ſeverity. So our SAVIOUR threatens t thoſe who continue impenitent under the goſpel, an the advantages of it, their caſe ſhall be more ſa than that of Tyre and Sidon, and "it ſhall be mo "tolerabl

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"tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah at the day of "judgment, than for them." Mat. xi. 20, 21. and Luke xii. 47, 48. There you have different degrees of punishment threatened, proportionable to the aggravations of the sins which men have committed; "The servant which knew his lord's will, and pre- "pared not himself, neither did according to his "will, shall be beaten with many stripes: but he "that knew it not, but did commit things worthy "of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes;" and so proportionably of all other aggravations of sins, "for to whom much is given, of him shall "much be required; and unto whom men have "committed much, of him they will ask the more." So likewise GOD will vindicate the contempt of the gospel more severely than of the law, because the confirmation of it is clearer, and the salvation offered by it greater. Heb. ii. 2, 3, 4. "If the word spoken "by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and "disobedience received a just recompence of reward, "how shall we escape?" &c. And so, Heb. x. 28, 29. "He that despised Moses his law, died with- "out mercy under two or three witnesses; of how "much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be "thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot "the son of GOD?" &c.

II. The righteousness of this judgment is further set forth to us in scripture by the impartiality of it. Hither belong all those texts, which remove from GOD that προσωπολημψία, that respect of persons, which is so incident to human tribunals. Now respect of persons is in distribution of justice, and hath regard to some external qualities or circumstances of the persons, which do not appertain to the merit of the cause, and upon account of those circumstances,

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to deal unequally with thoſe, whoſe caſe is eq
as when two perſons, who are equally guilty
crime, are brought to their trial, and the one is
demned, and the other acquitted, upon the acc
of friendſhip, or relation, or ſome other int
becauſe one is poor and the other rich, the one
powerful friends to intercede for him, the
not, the one brings a gift or bribe, the other
or upon any other account, beſides the pure m
of the cauſe; I ſay to deal thus in the diſtribu
of juſtice, is reſpect of perſons. Otherwiſe in
ters of mere grace and favour reſpect of pe
hath no place, according to that common ru
divines, προσωπολημψία *locum non habet in grat*
ſed in debitis. Now this the ſcripture every w
ſpeaks of, as a thing very far from God, De
17. "The Lord your God is the God of gods,
"Lord of lords, a great God, a mighty a
"terrible, which regardeth not perſons, nor t
"rewards." 2 Chron. xix. 7. "There is no
"quity with the Lord our God, nor reſpe
"perſons, nor taking of gifts." Job. xxxiv. 18
"Is it fit to ſay to a king, thou art wicked?
"princes, ye are ungodly? how much leſs to him
"accepteth not the perſon of princes, nor re
"eth the rich more than the poor? for they a
"the work of his hands." Rom. ii. 6. "Whc
"render to every man according to his deeds
"there is no reſpect of perſons with God." A
34, 35. "Of a truth I perceive that God is n
"ſpecter of perſons: but in every nation he
"feareth him, and worketh righteouſneſs, is ac
"ed with him." Eph. vi. 8, 9. The apoſtle
preſſeth the duties of ſervants to maſters, fron
conſideration, that "whatſoever good thing

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" man doth, the ſame ſhall he receive of the LORD, " whether he be bond or free;" and at the 9th ver. " Ye maſters, do the ſame thing unto them, for- " bearing threatning; knowing that your maſter " alſo is in heaven, neither is there reſpect of per- " ſons with him." He maketh this likewiſe an argument, why men ſhould not oppreſs and deal deceitfully one with another, Col. iii. 25. " But he " that doth wrong, ſhall receive for the wrong " which he hath done; and there is no reſpect of " perſons." And in general, St. Peter urgeth this conſideration upon all men to deter them from ſin in any kind, 1 Peter i. 17. " And if ye call on the fa- " ther, who without reſpect of perſons judgeth ac- " cording to every man's work, paſs the time of " your ſojourning here in fear."

And beſides that the ſcripture doth remove this at the greateſt diſtance from GOD, it gives us alſo ſeveral inſtances of the impartiality of the divine juſtice, that it is not to be perverted and turned aſide by any of thoſe extrinſecal conſiderations which commonly ſway with men; it is not to be prevailed with and overcome by flattery and entreaties, Mat. vii. 21, 22. " Not every one that ſaith unto me LORD, LORD, " ſhall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that " doth the will of my father which is in heaven," &c. The divine juſtice is not to be impoſed upon by good words, and external ſhews, and falſe profeſſions; ſo neither by any external relation to him; " for many ſhall come from the eaſt, and from " the weſt, and ſhall ſit down with Abraham, Iſaac, " and Jacob, in the kingdom of GOD, but the " children of the kingdom ſhall be caſt out into ut- " ter darkneſs."

And

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And however men may bear up themſelves now upon their worldly greatneſs and power, certainly there is a time coming, when the greateſt perſons in the world, thoſe who overturn kingdoms, and lay waſte countries, and oppreſs and ruin millions of mankind for the gratifying of their own luſts and ambition, I ſay there is a day coming, when even theſe, as much, nay, more than others, ſhall fear and tremble before the impartial juſtice of GOD. Rev. vi. 15, "And the kings of the earth, and the great men, "and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the "mighty men, and every bond-man and every free-"man ſhall hide themſelves in the dens, and in the "rocks of the mountains; for the great day of his "wrath is come, and who ſhall be able to ſtand?" The impartial juſtice of GOD will treat the greateſt and the meaneſt perſons alike, Rev. xx. 12. "I ſaw "the dead, ſmall and great, ſtand before GOD; "and the books were opened, and another book "was opened, which is the book of life; and the "dead were judged out of thoſe things which were "written in the books according to their works." All judged "according to their works."

I ſhould next proceed to vindicate the juſtice of GOD in the diſtribution of rewards and puniſhments from thoſe objections, which ſeem to impeach it. But before I enter upon this, it will be convenient to ſatisfy one queſtion, which hath occaſioned great diſputes in the world, and that is, how far juſtice, eſpecially as to the puniſhment of offenders, is eſſential to GOD? And for the clearing of this matter, I ſhall briefly lay down theſe propoſitions.

Firſt, I take this for a certain and undoubted truth, that every perfection is eſſential to GOD, and cannot be imagined to be ſeparated from the divine nature,

becauſe this is the natural notion which SERM. CXL.
ve of God, that he is a being that hath all
on.

ndly, the actual conſtant exerciſe of thoſe di-
rfections, the effects whereof are without him-
not eſſential to God. For inſtance, though
: eſſentially powerful and good, yet it is not
y, that he ſhould always exerciſe his power
oodneſs, but at ſuch times, and in ſuch a
, as ſeems beſt to his wiſdom; and this is
: true of his wiſdom and juſtice, becauſe theſe
ections, the effects whereof are terminated
mething without himſelf.

dly, it is eſſential to God to love goodneſs,
e ſin, wherever he ſees them. It is not ne-
there ſhould be a world, or reaſonable crea-
it: but upon ſuppoſition that God makes
atures, it is agreeable to the divine nature,
them good and righteous laws, to encourage
the doing of that which is good, and to diſ-
: them from doing that which is evil; which
be done, but by rewards and puniſhments;
refore it is agreeable to the perfection of the
nature, to reward goodneſs, and to puniſh ſin.

thly, as for thoſe rewards which the goſpel
th, and the puniſhments which it threatens,
ſome difference to be made between the re-
and puniſhing juſtice of God.

s for that abundant reward God is pleaſed
iſe to good men, the promiſe of it is found-
his goodneſs; and the performance of that
, in his juſtice; for it is juſtice to perform
promiſes, though the promiſe of ſo great and
nt a reward was mere goodneſs.

s for the puniſhing juſtice of God, about

SERM. CXL. which hath been the great queſtion, whether the be eſſential to GOD or not, it ſeems very plain, tha it is not neceſſary that GOD ſhould inflict thoſe judg ments which he threatens, becauſe he hath threatene them; for there is not the like obligation upon per ſons to perform their threatnings, that there is t perform their promiſes; becauſe GOD by his pro miſe becomes a debtor to thoſe to whom he make the promiſe; but when he threatens, he is the cre ditor, and we are debtors to his juſtice; and as creditor, he may remit the puniſhment which h hath threatened: but then if we conſider GOD a loving goodneſs and hating ſin; if we look upo him as governor of the world, and concerned t preſerve good order, to encourage holineſs and righ teouſneſs, and to diſcountenance ſin, under this con ſideration it is eſſential to him to puniſh ſin at ſuc times, and in ſuch manner and circumſtances, a ſeems beſt to his wiſdom.

And I am not at all moved by that, which is urg ed by ſome learned men to the contrary, that if pu niſhing juſtice were eſſential to GOD, then he mu puniſh the ſinner immediately, ſo ſoon as he hath of fended, and to the utmoſt of his power; becauſ whatever acts naturally, acts neceſſarily, and to th utmoſt: for I do not ſuppoſe ſuch a juſtice eſſentia to GOD as acts neceſſarily, but ſuch a juſtice, whic as to the time, and manner, and circumſtances o its acting, is regulated and determined by his wiſ dom; and there is the ſame reaſon likewiſe of his goodneſs.

I come now to the objections, which are taken partly from the diſpenſations of GOD in this world; and partly from the puniſhments of the other.

Firſt, as to the diſpenſations of GOD in this world, there

there are these two things objected against the justice of the divine providence. SERM. CXL.

I. The inequality of God's dealing with good and bad men in this world.

II. The translation of punishments, punishing one man's sin upon another, as the sins of the fathers upon the children, of the prince upon the people. I begin with the

I. Objection, the inequality of God's dealing with good and bad men in this world. In this life things happen promiscuously, "there is one event to "the righteous, and to the wicked;" if the wicked suffer and are afflicted, so are the righteous; if the righteous sometimes flourish, so do the wicked: and is not this unjust, that those who are so unequal as to their deserts, should be equally dealt withal? Or if there be any inequality, it is usually the wrong way; the wicked do, many times, prosper more in the world, and the righteous are frequently more afflicted. This was the great objection of old against the providence of God, which the heathen philosophers took so much pains to answer; nay, it did often shake the faith of holy and good men in the old testament. Job xii. 6. "The tabernacles of robbers prosper, "and they that provoke God are secure; into whose "hand God bringeth abundantly;" and chap. xxi. 7, 8, 9. he expostulates the same matter again: and David says, this was a great stumbling-block to him, Psal. lxxiii. 2, 3. and the like we find in the prophets, Jer. xii. 1. and Hab. i. 13. This objection I have elsewhere considered, I shall now very briefly offer two or three things, which I hope will be sufficient to break the force of it.

1. It must be granted, that it is not necessary to justice to shew itself immediately, and to dispense

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rewards and puniſhments ſo ſoon as there are objects for them. This is not thought neceſſary among men; much more ought we to leave it to the wiſdom of God to determine the time and circumſtances of the exerciſing of his juſtice; and we are not to conclude, that the providence of God is unjuſt, if he do not beſtow rewards, and inflict puniſhments, juſt when we think he ſhould.

2. If God intended this life for a ſtate of trial, wherein he would prove the obedience of men, and their free inclination to good or evil, it is not reaſonable to expect that he ſhould follow men with preſent rewards and puniſhments; for that would lay too great a force upon men, ſo that there would hardly be any opportunity of trying them; but, on the contrary, there is all the reaſon in the world to preſume that God ſhould exerciſe the graces and virtues of good men with afflictions and ſufferings, and ſuffer bad men to take their courſe for a while, and walk in their own ways, without continual checks, by frequent and remarkable judgments upon them, ſo often as they offend.

3. If there be another life after this, wherein men ſhall be judged "according to their works," then this objection vaniſheth; for that great day will ſet all things ſtrait, which ſeem now to be ſo crooked and irregular. The deferring of rewards and puniſhments to the moſt convenient ſeaſon, is ſo far from being a reflection upon the juſtice of God, that it is highly to the commendation of it. What Claudian ſays of Ruffinus, a very bad man, whoſe long impunity had tempted men to call in queſtion the juſtice of God, is conſiderable in this caſe:

Abſtulit hunc tandem Ruffini pœna tumultum,
Abſolvitque deos.

"The

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"The punishment which overtook him at last, "did not quiet those tumultuous thoughts, and ab- "solved the gods from all blame." When men look but a little way, and consider only the present state of things, they are ready to quarrel at the justice of them; but if they would look at the end of things, and have patience to stay till the last, to see the conclusion and winding up of things, they would then acquit GOD in their thoughts from all these imputations of injustice which, from the inequality of present dispensations, rash and inconsiderate men are apt to charge him withal.

II. Objection, from the translation of punishments, the punishing of one man's sin upon another, as of "the fathers upon the children," which GOD threatens in the second commandment, and did, in some sort, fulfil in Ahab, in "bringing the evil he had "threatned him withal, in his son's days," 1 Kings xxi. 19. The punishing the sin of one person upon a people, as that of Achan upon the whole congregation, Josh. xxii. 20. "Did not Achan the son of "Zerah commit a trespass in the accursed thing, "and wrath fell on all the congregation of Israel? "and that man perished not alone in his iniquity." And the sin of David upon the people, 2 Sam. xxiv. When seventy thousand died of the plague, for David's sin in numbering the people. Now how is this agreeable to justice? Is it not a known rule, *Noxa caput sequitur?* "mischief pursues the sinner?" What can be more reasonable, *Quam ut peccata suos teneant, authores?* "Than that mens faults should be charg- "ed upon the authors," and punishment fall upon the guilty?

For answer to this,

1. It is not unreasonable that one man should bear

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the puniſhment of another's fault, if he be willing and content to bear it, *volenti non fit injuria*; "There "is no wrong done to thoſe that are willing to un- "dergo it," though they be innocent; which was the caſe of our bleſſed SAVIOUR ſuffering for us, "the juſt for the unjuſt," as the ſcripture expreſſeth it.

2. Where the perſon, upon whom the puniſhment is transferred, is likewiſe a ſinner, and obnoxious to GOD, there can be no injuſtice; becauſe he hath deſerved it upon his own account, and GOD may take what occaſion he pleaſeth to puniſh them that deſerve to be puniſhed.

3. In puniſhing "the iniquity of the father upon "the children," the guilty perſon, that is, the father, is puniſhed in the calamity of his children; for a man's children are himſelf multiplied; and therefore it is very remarkable, that in the ſecond commandment, GOD promiſeth "to ſhew mercy to "thouſands of generations of them that love him; "but he viſits the iniquities of the fathers upon the "children, but to the third and fourth generation," that is, ſo far as man may live to ſee them puniſhed and ſuffer in their puniſhment.

4. As to the puniſhment of the people for the ſins of their princes and governors, and one part of a community for another, ſuppoſing all of them to be ſinners, which is the true caſe, GOD may lay the puniſhment where he pleaſeth; and there is no more injuſtice than when a man is whipt on the back for the theft which his hand committed, a community being one body: beſides, the prince is puniſhed in the loſs of his people, the glory of a king conſiſting in the multitude of his ſubjects.

The objection with reſpect to the other world, the

the punishment of temporal evils with eternal, is elsewhere answered. SERM. CXL.

The use we should make of this whole discourse is,

First, If God be just and righteous, let us acknowledge it in all his dispensations, even in those, the reason whereof is most hidden and obscure: Neh. ix. 33. speaking of the great afflictions that had befallen God's own people, yet this he lays down as a firm principle, "howbeit, thou art just in all that "is brought upon us."

Secondly, this is matter of terror to wicked men. God doth now exercise his milder attributes towards sinners, his mercy, and patience, and goodness: but if we despise these, that terrible attribute of his justice will display itself; and this the scripture describes in a severe manner; "the LORD revengeth, and is "jealous; the LORD will take vengeance on his "adversaries, and reserveth wrath for his enemies."

Thirdly, this is matter of comfort to good men, that the righteous God governs the world, and will judge it: "the LORD reigneth, let the earth re-"joice," Psal. xcvii. 1. And he gives the reason of it in the next verse; "righteousness and judgment "are the habitation of his throne." Though he be omnipotent, we need not fear; for his power is always under the conduct of eternal righteousness.

Fourthly, let us imitate this righteousness; let us endeavour "to be righteous as he is righteous;" let us give to God the love, reverence, and obedience which are due to him; and in all our dealings, what is just and due to men. This duty hath an immutable reason, founded in the nature of God.

SERMON CXLI.

The truth of God.

DEUT. xxxii. 4.

—— *A* God *of truth,*

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IN ſpeaking to this attribute, I ſhall

I. Shew you what we are to underſtand by the truth of God.

II. Endeavour to prove that this perfection belongs to God, that he is "a God of truth."

III. Anſwer ſome objections that may be made againſt it; and then make ſome uſe of it.

I. What we are to underſtand by the truth of God. I ſhall take it as the ſcripture uſeth it in a large ſenſe, ſo as to include not only the veracity of God, but his faithfulneſs. Hence it is that, in ſcripture, truth and faithfulneſs are ſo often put together, and frequently put one for another: Iſa. xxv. 1. "Thy "counſels of old are faithfulneſs and truth." Rev. xxi. 1. "Theſe words are true and faithful." And the faithfulneſs of God, in performing his promiſes, is frequently called his truth. And becauſe the ſcripture uſeth them promiſcuouſly, we need not be very ſolicitous to find out diſtinct notions of them: but if you will, they may be diſtinguiſhed thus: the truth or veracity of God hath place in every declaration of his mind; the faithfulneſs of God, only in his promiſes.

For the firſt, the veracity or truth of God; this hath place in every declaration of his mind; and ſignifies an exact correſpondence and conformity between

his word and his mind, and consequently be- SERM.
his word and the truth and reality of things. CXLI.
orrespondence of his word with his mind, de-
upon the rectitude of his will; the conformity
word with the reality of things, not only up-
rectitude of his will, but the perfection of his
edge, and the infallibility of his understanding:
t when we say God is true, or speaks truth,
an thus, that his words are a plain declaration
mind, and the true representation of things, in
tion to falshood, which is speaking otherwise
he thing is; and hypocrisy, that is, speaking
rise than we think. For instance, when God
es any thing to be so, or not to be so, to have
hus, or not to have been thus; the thing real-
, and he thinks so; when he expresseth his
of any thing, he does really desire it; when
nmands any thing, or forbids us any thing, it
ly his mind and will that we should do what he
ands, and avoid what he forbids; when he de-
and foretels any thing future, it really shall
to pass, and he really intended it should; if
claration be to be understood absolutely, it
bsolutely come to pass; if the declaration be
understood conditionally, it shall come to pass,
intends it shall, if the condition be performed.
ondly, the faithfulness of God. This only
lace in his promises, in which there is an obli-
of justice superadded to his word; for God,
promise, doth not only declare what he in-
and what shall be; but confers a right upon
to whom the promise is made, so as that the
of his promise would not only cast an impu-
upon his truth, but upon his justice.

That this perfection belongs to God. And
shall endeavour to prove,

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First, from the dictates of natural light.

Secondly, from ſcripture.

First, from the dictates of natural light. Natural light tells us, that truth and faithfulneſs are perfections, and conſequently belong to the divine nature; and that falſhood and a lie are imperfections, and to be removed from God. There is nothing that is eſteemed among men a greater contumely and reproach, than to give a man the lie, to call him a liar, becauſe it is an argument of ſo much baſeneſs, and of a low, and mean, and ſervile ſpirit; the uſual temptation to it being fear of loſing ſome advantage, or incurring ſome danger. Hence was that ſaying, that "it is the property of a ſlave to lie, but "of a free-man to ſpeak truth:" now, whatever argues baſeneſs or imperfection, our reaſon tells us is infinitely to be ſeparated from the moſt perfect being. "God cannot be tempted with evil," the divine nature being all-ſufficient, can have no temptation to be otherwiſe than good, and juſt, and true, and faithful. Men are tempted to lie by advantage, and out of fear: but the divine nature hath the ſecurity of its fulneſs and all-ſufficiency, that it cannot hope for any increaſe, nor fear any impairment of its eſtate. Men are unfaithful, and break their words, either becauſe they are raſh and inconſiderate in paſſing of them, or forgetful in minding them, or inconſtant in keeping of them, or impotent and unable to perform them: but none of theſe are incident to God; his infinite wiſdom, and perfect knowledge, and clear foreſight of all events, ſecure him both from inconſiderateneſs, and inconſtancy, and forgetfulneſs; and his infinite power renders him able to perform what he hath ſpoken, and to make good his word. And that theſe are the natural dictates and ſuggeſtions of our minds, appears

appears clearly from the reaſoning of the heathens in this matter, who were deſtitute of divine revelation. Plato de repub. l. 2. lays down this as a certain truth, "that lying and falſhood are imperfec-"tions, and odious to GOD and men; τὸ μὲν ψεύδεσθαι οὐ μόνον ἀπὸ θεῶν, ἀλλὰ καὶ ὑπ' ἀνθρώπων μισεῖται." And afterwards he tells us, "that the "divine nature is free from all temptation hereto, "either from advantage or fear; ὐκ ἄρ' ἐστὶν οὐ ἕνεκα ἂν θεὸς ψεύδοιτο; πάντη ἄρα ἀψευδὲς τὸ θεῖον;" and concludes, "therefore GOD is true, and deals plain-"ly with us, both in his words and actions, and is "neither changed himſelf, nor deceives us." Porphyry, in the life of Pythagoras, tells us, "that this "was one of his precepts, μάλιστα δ' ἀληθεύειν; τοῦτο γὰρ μόνον δυνασθαι τὰς ἀνθρώπους ποιεῖν θεῷ παραπλησίους; and afterwards he adds, "that truth "is ſo great a perfection, that if GOD would render "himſelf viſible to men, he would chuſe light for "his body, and truth for his ſoul."

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Secondly, from ſcripture. The ſcripture doth very frequently attribute this to GOD, 2 Sam. vii. 28. "And now, O LORD GOD, thou art that GOD, and "thy words be true." Pſal. xxv. 10. "All the "paths of the LORD are mercy and truth." Pſal. xxxi. 5. "Into thine hand I commit my ſpirit; thou "haſt redeemed me, O LORD GOD of truth." Rev. iii. 7. "Theſe things ſaith he that is holy, he that "is true." Rev. vi. 10. "How long, O LORD, "holy and true?" xv. 3. "Juſt and true are thy "ways, thou king of ſaints." xvi. 7. "True and "righteous are thy judgments." Hither we may refer thoſe texts which ſpeak of the plenty and abundance of GOD's truth: Ex. xxxiv. 6. "Abundant "in goodneſs and truth." Pſal. lxxxvi. 15. "Plen-

"teous

SERM. CXLI.

" teous in mercy and truth;" and thoſe which ſpeak of the duration and eternity of it: Pſal. c. 5. " And " his truth endureth to all generations." cxvii. 2. " And the truth of the LORD endureth for ever." cxlvi. 6. " Who keepeth truth for ever."

As the ſcripture doth attribute this perfection to GOD, ſo it removes the contrary from him with the greateſt abhorrence and deteſtation: Num. xxiii. 19. " GOD is not a man, that he ſhould lie, neither the " ſon of man, that he ſhould repent: hath he ſaid, " and ſhall not he do it? or hath he ſpoken, and " ſhall he not make it good?" They are Balaam's words, but GOD put them into his mouth. 1 Sam. xv. 29. " The ſtrength of Iſrael will not lie, nor " repent: for he is not a man that he ſhould re- " pent." Rom. iii. 4. " Yea let GOD be true, and " every man a liar." Nay, the ſcripture goes further; does not only remove lying, and falſhood, and inconſtancy from GOD, but ſpeaks of theſe as things impoſſible to the divine nature: Tit. i. 2. " In " hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, " promiſed before the world began." Heb. vi. 18. " That by two immutable things, in which it was " impoſſible for God to lie, we might have a ſtrong " conſolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold " upon the hope ſet before us."

And the ſcripture doth not only in general attribute this perfection to God, but doth more particularly aſſure us of his ſincerity and truth and faithfulneſs. Of his ſincerity; that he deals plainly with us, and ſpeaks what he intends, that his words are the image of his thoughts, and a true repreſentation of his mind. God is very careful to remove this jealouſy out of the minds of men, who are apt to entertain unworthy thoughts of God, as if notwithſtandin

al

hat he hath declared, he had a ſecret deſign to men; therefore he interpoſeth his oath for our ter aſſurance, Ezek. xxxiii. 11. "As I live, ſaith ie Lord God, I have no pleaſure in the death f the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his ay and live." When God ſpeaks to us, he ks his mind, and hath no deſign to circumvent poſſeſs us with error and deluſion: if he offer and happineſs, we may believe he is real; and if he did not intend to beſtow it upon us, or if : were no ſuch thing as a future glory, he would have declared it to us; this was the temper of Saviour, who was "the expreſs image of the 'ather, full of grace and truth." John xiv. 2. a my Father's houſe are many manſions; if it ere not ſo, I would have told you."

nd as the ſcripture aſſures us of his ſincerity, ſo is truth and faithfulneſs in the accompliſhment ll his predictions, and performances of all his niſes. As for the truth of his predictions, and ain accompliſhment of them, the ſcripture freıtly uſeth this proverbial ſpeech, to aſſure us of certainty of their accompliſhment; "Heaven nd earth ſhall paſs away, but my words ſhall ot paſs away." Mat. xxiv. 35. For the faithefs of God in his promiſes, the ſcripture makes uent mention of it: Deut. vii. 9. "Know therefore that the Lord thy God, he is God, the ıithful God, which keepeth covenant and mer-y." Pſal. lxxxix. 33, 34. "I will not ſuffer ıy faithfulneſs to fail: my covenant will I not reak, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my ps." The ſcripture doth record God's punctuıl full performance of his promiſes, particularf that promiſe to Abraham, after four hundred years,

SERM. CXLI. years, to bring the children of Iſrael out of Egy
" and to give them the land of Canaan for an i
" heritance." Gen. xv. 13. The punctual accoi
pliſhment you have recorded Ex. xii. 41. " A
" it came to paſs at the end of the four hundred a
" thirty years, even the ſelf ſame day it came
" paſs, that all the hoſts of the LORD went c
" from the land of Egypt." See likewiſe Joſ. x
44, 45, and xxiii. 14. 1 Kings viii. 56. And up
this account it is that GOD is ſo frequently in ſcri
ture ſtyled " the GOD that keepeth covenan
1 Kings viii. 23. Neh. i. 5. ix. 32. and in ſeve
other places. And ſo likewiſe of predictions of e
to come, GOD is true in fulfilling his word: 1 Sa
xv. 29. When the prophet had threatned Saul
rent the kingdom from him, he adds, " the ſtreng
" of Iſrael will not lie, nor repent; for he is not
" man that he ſhould repent."

III. I come to remove ſome objections that m
be made againſt the truth and faithfulneſs of GOD.

Firſt, It is objected againſt the ſincerity of Go
and his plain dealing, that he is ſometimes repreſer
ed in ſcripture, as inſpiring prophets with falſe m
ſages, 1 Kings xxii. 20, &c. Jer. iv. 10. xx.
Ezek. xiv. 9.

Anſ. As to three of theſe texts, it is a known H
braiſm to expreſs things in an imperative and acti
form, which are to be underſtood only permiſſive.
So where " the devils beſought CHRIST, that
" would ſuffer them to enter into the herd of ſwi
" he ſaid unto them, Go," Mat. viii. 31. he c
not command, but permit them. And ſo John x
27. where our SAVIOUR ſays to Judas, " what th
" doſt do quickly;" we are not to underſtan
that he commanded him to betray him, though th

ſeem to be expreſſed in the form. So likewiſe here, where an evil ſpirit offered himſelf to be "a lying "ſpirit in the mouth of the prophet;" and God ſays," go forth, and do ſo; "this only ſignifies a permiſſion, not a command. And ſo Jer. iv. 10. where the prophet complains that God had greatly deceived the people, "ſaying, they ſhould have peace, "when the ſword reached to the ſoul;" we are to underſtand this no otherwiſe, but that God permitted the falſe prophets to deceive them, propheſying peace to them; as appears by the hiſtory. Ezek. xiv. 9. "I the LORD have deceived that prophet;" that is, permitted him to be deceived, and to deceive the people, as a juſt judgment upon them for their infidelity, with reſpect to his true prophets. This he threatens at the 5th verſe; "I will take the "houſe of Iſrael in their own heart, becauſe they "are all eſtranged from me through their idols;" becauſe they have choſen to themſelves falſe gods, I will ſuffer them to be deceived with falſe prophets: and that this is the meaning, appears by the threatening added, "and I will ſtretch my hand upon "him, and I will deſtroy him from the midſt of "the people." Now God will not puniſh that whereof he is the author. SERM. CXLI.

That text, Jer. xx. 7. "Thou haſt deceived me, "and I was deceived," ſignifies no more, but that he had miſtaken the promiſe of God to him, who when he gave him his commiſſion, told him he would be with him, by which he underſtood that no evil ſhould come to him, and "now he was be-"come a deriſion, and the people mocked him;" and in his paſſion and weakneſs he breaks forth into this expreſſion, "thou haſt deceived me, and I was "deceived," whereas it was his own miſtake of the meaning

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meaning of God's promiſe, which was not that he ſhould not meet with ſcorn, and oppoſition, and perſecution, but that they ſhould not prevail againſt him, as you may ſee at the latter end of the firſt chapter.

Second objection againſt the faithfulneſs of God as to performance of his promiſe. It is objected, that God did not give the children of Iſrael all the land which he promiſed to Abraham; as will appear by comparing Gen. xviii. 19, 20. with Joſh. xiii. 1. &c. and Judg. ii. 20, 21. Gen. xv. 18. God promiſed to give Abraham and his ſeed ſuch a land, the bounds whereof he deſcribes Joſh. xiii. 1. It is ſaid there, that "there remained very much land" yet unconquered, which they had not got the poſſeſſion of. And Judg. ii. 20. it is ſaid, that the people having not performed their part of the covenant, God would ſuſpend the further performance of his promiſe, and would not drive out any more of the nations before them; and it is probable that the Iſraelites never were poſſeſſed of the promiſed land in the full latitude and extent of the promiſe.

Anſ. This covenant of God with Abraham, was upon conſideration of his paſt faith and obedience, though it ſeems the full performance of it did likewiſe depend upon the future obedience of his poſterity; in purſuance of this covenant, notwithſtanding all the murmurings and rebellions of that people, GOD did bring them into the promiſed land, though "they provoked him to deſtroy them many a time, "becauſe he remembered his covenant with Abra-"ham;" when they were poſſeſſed of it, GOD gave them a title to the reſt, and would have aſſiſted them in the conqueſt of it, if they had performed the condition required on their part, that is, continued faithful and obedient to him: but they did not,

and

and thereby diſcharged God from any further per- SERM.
formance of his promiſe; and God, when he had CXLI.
done this, had fully performed the covenant he made with Abraham, ſo far as concerned his part, as appears by the acknowledgment of Joſhua, even in a time when a great part of the land was unconquered, Joſh. xxi. 44. and of Solomon, 1 Kings viii. 56. yea, and had it not been that God had made this covenant, as well upon conſideration of Abraham's faith and obedience, as upon condition of the future obedience of his poſterity, the rebellions and diſobedience of the people in the wilderneſs had releaſed God wholly from the promiſe; and he had not been unfaithful if "he had deſtroyed utterly that people, "and made a full end of them," and they had never entered into that land; becauſe a failure of the condition doth make the obligation to ceaſe: and that this condition was implied in this covenant with Abraham, appears by theſe texts, Deut. vii. 12, 13. xi. 22, 23, 32. and Judg. ii. 20, 21. God gives this reaſon why he ſuſpended the complete performance of his promiſe; "The anger of the Lord was hot "againſt Iſrael, and he ſaid, Becauſe that this peo- "ple hath tranſgreſſed my covenant which I com- "manded their fathers, and have not hearkened to "my voice, I alſo will not henceforth drive out "any from before them, of the nations which Jo- "ſhua left when he died."

Third objection: God is not punctual in performing his threatenings; as when he threatened Adam, Gen. ii. 17. "In the day thou eateſt thereof thou "ſhalt ſurely die;" which yet was not accompliſhed, for he lived many hundred years after. God threatened Ahab "to bring evil upon him and his "family," 1 Kings xxi. 21. But, upon his humili-

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ation, he is pleaſed to reſpite it, ver. 29. So God threatened Hezekiah with death, but, upon his prayer, "adds fifteen years to his life." 2 Kings xx. Thus Nineveh was threatened, but, upon their repentance, "God repented of the evil," Jon. iii. 10. Now how is this deferring and turning away of judgment conſiſtent with the truth of God? doth not this ſeem to charge him with falſhood or levity?

Anſ. This may be ſaid in general, that every one that underſtands the nature of God, cannot but be very well aſſured, that falſhood and levity are very far from God; and though he could not untie ſome particular knots, and anſwer all difficulties, yet he ought to reſt ſatisfied in this aſſurance. I confeſs this objection is troubleſome, and requires a diſtinct conſideration. I will not be peremptory in nice matters, but I ſhall, with ſubmiſſion, offer theſe things in anſwer to it.

1. As for the expreſſion of God's repenting, we are to underſtand it, as many others in ſcripture, after the manner of men, and ſpoken by way of condeſcenſion to our weakneſs, and accommodated to our capacities, and not as caſting any imputation of falſhood or inconſtancy upon God, as if either he did not intend what he ſaith, or out of levity did alter his mind. When God is ſaid to repent, the expreſſion only ſignifies thus much, that God doth not execute that which ſeemed to us to have been his purpoſe, that he is pleaſed to do otherwiſe than his threatenings ſeemed openly to expreſs, becauſe of ſome tacit condition implied in them; and this doth not derogate either from the truth, or ſincerity, or conſtancy of God, in his word. Not from his truth; for he ſpeaks what he intends really, if ſomething did not intervene to prevent the judgment threatened;

upon

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which he was resolved, when he threatened, taken off, and stop his judgments: nor doth rogate from his sincerity and plainness; for he told us that his threatenings have such conditions ied in them: nor doth it derogate from the ancy and immutability of God; because God not *mutare consilium, sed sententiam*; he doth change his counsel and purpose, but takes off sentence, which he had passed with reserved itions.

As to the instances, that I may give more par- ar satisfaction to them, I shall consider the threat- gs of God with this double respect, either with ion to a law, or with relation to the event; with ion to a law, as they are the sanction of it; or relation to the event, as they are predictions of ething to come.

1.) Some threatenings have only relation to a as they are the sanction of it. And thus con- ed, they differ from promises; for promises con- right, *omne promissum cadit in debitum*; but a atening doth not convey any right, nor, if for- , can the party complain of wrong done to him; therefore, in this case, it can only signify what offence against the law deserves, and what the ider may expect; for the end of threatening is punishment, but the avoiding of it. And this answer the first instance. God gave Adam a ; and, by way of sanction, not of prediction an event, he threatened the breach of it with h: now God did not execute the punishment atened at the time threatened, but deferred it, this without any impeachment of his justice or h, because this threatening was only the sanction he law.

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(2.) We may conſider threatenings with relatio to the event, and as predictions; and as to the ac compliſhment of theſe, there ſeems to be a greati degree of neceſſity, becauſe the honour of God knowledge, and power, and truth ſeem to be cor cerned in them; for if his word be not fulfilled, muſt either be for want of knowledge to foreſe events, or power to bring them to paſs, or conſtan cy to his word. Now if we conſider threatening with reſpect to the event, as they are predictions c future judgments, I think all the other inſtances ma be ſatisfied, by laying down this rule for the unde ſtanding of them, viz. "That all prophetical threa "enings or predictions of judgments are to be unde "ſtood with this tacit condition, if there do not in "tervene the humiliation, and repentance, and pray "of the perſons againſt whom the judgment "threatened; and if ſo, God may, upon repentanc "without any impeachment of the honour of h "truth, or knowledge, or power, either defer, c "abate, or remit the puniſhment." And that th predictions of judgments are to be underſtood wit this condition, appears clearly from that known tex Jer. xviii. 7, 8.

I come now to the laſt thing I propoſed, to mak ſome uſe of this doctrine.

Firſt, If God be a "God of truth," then th gives us aſſurance that he doth not deceive us, th the faculties which he hath given us are not falſe but when they have clear perceptions of thing they do not err and miſtake. Were it not for th veracity of God, we might, for any thing we know be under a conſtant deluſion; and no man could d monſtrate the contrary, but that this is our mak and our temper, and the very frame of our unde

ſtanding

ſtandings, to be then moſt of all deceived, when we think ourſelves to be moſt certain; I ſay, no man could be aſſured of the contrary, but from hence, becauſe veracity and truth is a divine perfection; and therefore GOD cannot be the author of error and deluſion. Therefore we may be aſſured, that the frame of our underſtanding is not a cheat, but that our faculties are true, and unleſs it be our own fault, we need not be deceived in things that are neceſſary to our happineſs. SERM. CXLI.

Secondly, If GOD be "a GOD of truth," then there is reaſon why we ſhould believe and aſſent to whatever we are ſatisfied is revealed to us by GOD. A divine revelation is a ſufficient ground for the moſt firm aſſent; for this very thing, that any thing is revealed by GOD, is the higheſt evidence, and ought to give us the moſt firm aſſurance of the truth of it. Hence it is, that the word of GOD is called "the word of truth," yea, "truth itſelf," John xvii. 17. "Thy word is truth."

Therefore whoever entertains the ſcriptures as the word of GOD, and is ſatisfied of the divine authority of them, ought, in reaſon, to believe every thing contained in them, yea, though there be ſome things of which no reaſonable account can be given, and which our reaſon and underſtanding cannot give us particular ſatisfaction in; yet, becauſe we are ſatisfied that they are revealed by GOD, "who cannot "lie;" whoſe knowledge is infallible, and whoſe word is true, we ought, upon this higher and ſuperior reaſon, to yield a firm aſſent to the truth of them: if we do not, we diſhonour this perfection of GOD, and rob him of this eſſential property, his veracity. 1 John v. 10. "he that believeth on the ſon of GOD, "hath the witneſs in himſelf: he that believeth not

SERM. CXLI. "GOD, hath made him a liar, becauſe he beli
"not the record that GOD gave of his ſon."
on the other hand, if we do believe what GOD
revealed, we glorify this perfection of his, a
our ſeal to his veracity. So it is ſaid of Abra
Rom. iv. 20. That "he was ſtrong in faith, g
"glory to GOD." And St. John the baptiſt, f
ing concerning our SAVIOUR, ſaith, John iii
"He that hath received his teſtimony, hath
"his ſeal, that GOD is true."

Thirdly, if GOD be "a GOD of truth," and
ful in performing his promiſe, then here is a
foundation of our hope and truſt. If GOD have
any promiſe, we may ſecurely rely upon it, t
ſhall be made good; we may "hold faſt" our
"without wavering, becauſe he is faithful wh
"promiſed," Heb. x. 23. Hence it is tha
bleſſings of GOD's covenant are called "ſure
"cies," Iſa. lv. 3.

We attribute much to the word of a faithful f
and look upon the promiſe of an honeſt man a
good ſecurity; but men may fail us when w
upon them; but "GOD is true," though "al
"ſhould prove liars." Men are fickle and
ble; but the nature of GOD is fixed, he cann
thoſe that truſt in him. When GOD hath mac
promiſe to us, we may plead it with him, anc
him with his faithfulneſs. So we find Davi
2 Sam. vii. 25, &c.

Only we ſhould be careful to perform the
tion which is required on our part, Heb. iv.
ſhould "take heed, leſt a promiſe being left u
"one ſhould come ſhort of it," by not perfo
the condition; for that doth releaſe and diſ
him of the promiſe; and he is faithful, thou

doth not perform what he promiſed, becauſe he did not promiſe, but upon condition: and this ſeems to be the meaning of thoſe words, 2 Tim. ii. 13. "If "we believe not, yet he abideth faithful, he cannot "deny himſelf." He ſaid before, that if we perform the conditions required, God will beſtow the bleſſings promiſed: "it is a faithful ſaying; for if "we be dead with him, we ſhall alſo live with him; "if we ſuffer, we ſhall alſo reign with him: but if "we deny him," the curſe threatened will then take place, and "he will deny us," and God is not unfaithful in doing this, he does not deny himſelf. SERM. CXLI.

Now if we have ſuch aſſurance, we may truſt him with our greateſt concernments, and venture our ſouls with him: Pſal. xxxi. 5. "Into thine hand I "commit my ſpirit; thou haſt redeemed me, O "LORD God of truth." We ſhould rely upon him, when there are the greateſt improbabilities of the accompliſhment of his promiſes. Thus did Abraham, Rom. iv. 17, &c.

This ſhould make us alſo "patient in hope:" if a promiſe be not ſpeedily accompliſhed, we ſhould not be dejected or diſquieted. David challengeth himſelf upon this account, Pſal. xlii. 11, "Why "art thou caſt down, O my ſoul? and why art thou "diſquieted within me? Hope thou in God; for I "ſhall yet praiſe him, who is the health of my "countenance, and my God."

Fourthly, the truth of God is matter of terror to the wicked. All the threatenings of temporal evils may juſtly be expected, becauſe their ſins deſerve them, and there is no condition implied in them, upon which thou canſt reaſonably hope for the avoiding or abating of the evils threatened, but of humiliation and repentance; and if, notwithſtanding theſe

SERM. CXLI.

threatenings, thou continueſt in thy ſins, and "bleſſ-
"ſeſt thyſelf, ſaying, I ſhall have peace, though
"thou walk in the imaginations of thy heart;" by this very thing thou provokeſt the juſtice of GOD, "not to ſpare thee," and makeſt "his wrath and "his jealouſy to ſmoke againſt thee;" and if thou continueſt impenitent, however he may defer the execution of temporal evils, his truth and veracity is concerned to inflict eternal puniſhments upon thee; for "he hath ſworn in his wrath," that ſuch "ſhall "not enter into his reſt."

Fifthly, let us propound to ourſelves the truth of GOD for our pattern and imitation: would you be like GOD? be true and faithful. Truth and faithfulneſs are divine perfections; but lying and falſhood are the properties of the devil, and the predominant qualities of hell. The character of the devil is, that "he abode not in the truth, and there is no "truth in him; when he ſpeaketh a lie, it is of his "own; for he is a liar, and the father of it." John viii. 44.

One of the moſt natural notions that we have of religion is, that it is to imitate GOD, and to endeavour to be like him, ſo far as we are capable; and to contradict any of the divine excellencies and perfections, is the higheſt ſin; becauſe it is againſt the cleareſt dictates of our mind, and contrary to thoſe principles which are moſt deeply rooted in our nature. No man can be cruel and unmerciful, falſe and treacherous, without a very high degree of guilt; becauſe theſe ſins are contrary to the chiefeſt and moſt eſſential perfections of GOD. Lying is a ſin that would fly in the face of an heathen, becauſe it directly contradicts thoſe natural notions which every man hath of GOD and religion; therefore we find that there

there is hardly any thing that men are more aſhamed of, than to be taken in a lie; and it is eſteemed the higheſt reproach to be charged with it; it argues ſuch a direct contrariety to that which is the rule of perfection, "the nature of God," and conſequently ſo much imperfection and baſeneſs; he that tells a lie out of fear, is at once bold towards God, and baſe towards men. SERM. CXLI.

Upon theſe accounts God expreſſeth himſelf highly offended with thoſe that practiſe lying and falſhood, and to have a deteſtation of them; Prov. xii. 22. "Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord." It renders us unlike to him; Eph. iv. 24, 25. "Put "on the new man, which after God is created in "righteouſneſs and true holineſs (or in the holineſs "of truth.") And from hence he infers, "where"fore putting away lying, ſpeak every man truth "to his neighbour: for we are members one of "another." Col. iii. 9, 10. "Lie not one to an"other, ſeeing that ye have put off the old man "with his deeds; and have put on the new man, "which is renewed in knowledge, after the image "of him that created him:" that is, becauſe we profeſs to be conformed to the image of God. More particularly, we ſhould charge ourſelves with truth and faithfulneſs towards God and men.

1. Towards God, in our oaths, and vows, and covenants. In our oaths, when we ſwear in any matter, we tell God that what we ſpeak is truth, and invoke him to bear witneſs to it. To falſify in an oath is one of the moſt ſolemn affronts that we can put upon the God of truth.

And ſo in our vows, which are a ſolemn promiſe to God, of ſuch things in which we have no precedent obligation lying upon us. He that regardeth truth

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truth will neither be rash in making a vow, n careless to perform it. Eccles. v. 4. "When th "vowest a vow to God, defer not to pay it, for "hath no pleasure in fools." Not to perform w we have vowed, is an argument of folly; either rashness in the making of it, or of inconstancy not keeping it.

So likewise in all our covenants with God, serve him and obey him, and keep his commandments, we should directly charge ourselves w performance of these. There is a natural obli tion upon us to these things from the very law of creation, though we should never solemnly m any such promise, nor enter into any such enga ments, because it is a tacit condition of our bein but the taking of this covenant solemnly upon u baptism, strengthens the obligation, and makes unfaithfulness the greater sin. All our hopes of h piness are founded in the faithfulness of God; if thou be false to him, how canst thou expect should be faithful to thee? It is true indeed, t "he abides faithful, he cannot deny himself;" if thou hast any ingenuity in thee, this should be argument to thee to be faithful to him; I am s this can be no encouragement to thee to be unfai ful: for if thou breakest the covenant thou hast tered into, and neglectest the conditions upon wh God hath suspended the performance of his prom thou dischargest the obligation on his part.

2. Towards men: we should charge ourse with truth in all our words, and faithfulness in our promises. It becomes us who worship " "God of truth," to speak truth; to use plain and sincerity in all our words, to abhor falshood dissimulation, and those more refined ways of lyi

by equivocation of words, and ſecret reſervations of our minds, on purpoſe to deceive. Thoſe that plead for theſe, it is a ſign they do not underſtand the nature of God, and of religion; which is, to conform ourſelves to the divine perfections. We meet with many complaints in the old teſtament, of the want of truth and faithfulneſs among men, Pſal. xii. 1, 2. Iſa. lix. 13, 14, 15. Jer. vii. 2, 8, 9. ii. 4, 5, 6. Hoſ. iv. 1. I am afraid there is as much reaſon for this complaint now; for we live in an age of greater light, which doth reprove and make manifeſt this work of darkneſs; and methinks there is no ſadder ſign of the decay of Chriſtianity, and of the little power and influence that the goſpel hath upon us, than that there is ſo little regard had by Chriſtians to theſe moral duties, which, becauſe moral (however men may ſlight that word) are therefore of eternal and indiſpenſable obligation, having their foundation in the nature of God. SERM. CXLI.

To conclude all: that man that can diſpenſe with himſelf as to moral duties, that makes no conſcience of telling a lie, or breaking his word, what badge ſoever he may wear, what title ſoever he may call himſelf by, as it is impoſſible that ſuch a man ſhould be a true Chriſtian, it is as to reconcile "the God "of truth," and "the father of lies."

SER-

SERMON CXLII.

The holineſs of God.

1 PET. i. 16.

Be ye holy, for I am holy.

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IN ſpeaking to this attribute, I ſhall,

I. Inquire, what we are to underſtand by the holineſs of God.

II. Endeavour to ſhew, that this perfection belongs to God.

I. What we are to underſtand by the holineſs of God. There is ſome difficulty in fixing the proper notion of it; for though there be no property more frequently attributed to God, in ſcripture, than this of holineſs, yet there is none of all God's attributes, which divines have ſpoken more ſparingly of, than this.

The general notion of holineſs is, that it is a ſeparation from a common and ordinary, to a peculiar and excellent uſe. And this notion of holineſs is applicable either to things or perſons. To things; thus the veſſels of the tabernacle, and the veſtments of the prieſts, were ſaid to be holy, becauſe they were ſeparated from common uſe, and appropriated to the peculiar and excellent uſe of the ſervice of God. Holineſs of perſons is two-fold; either relative and external, which ſignifies the peculiar relation of a perſon to God; ſuch were called, ἱερεῖς, prieſts, or holy men: or elſe habitual and inherent; ſuch is the holineſs of good men, and it is a ſeparation from moral imperfection, that is, from ſin and impurity:

purity: and this is called ὁσιότης, and the primary notion of it is negative, and ſignifies the abſence and remotion of ſin. And this appears in thoſe explications which the ſcripture gives of it. Thus it is explained by oppoſition to ſin and impurity, 2 Cor. vii. 1. "Let us cleanſe ourſelves from all filthineſs "of the fleſh and ſpirit, perfecting holineſs;" where holineſs is oppoſed to all filthineſs. Sometimes by the negation of ſin and defilement. So we find holy, and without blame put together, Eph. i. 4. "holy "and without blemiſh," Eph. v. 27. "holy, harm-"leſs, and undefiled," Heb. vii. 26. It is true, indeed, this negative notion doth imply ſomething that is poſitive; it doth not only ſignify the abſence of ſin, but a contrariety to it; we cannot conceive the abſence of ſin, without the preſence of grace; as, take away crookedneſs from a thing, and it immediately becomes ſtrait. When ever we are made holy, every luſt and corruption in us is ſupplanted by the contrary grace. SERM. CXLII.

Now this habitual holineſs of perſons, which conſiſts in a ſeparation from ſin, is a conformity to the holineſs of GOD; and by this we may come to underſtand what holineſs in GOD is: and it ſignifies the peculiar eminency of the divine nature, whereby it is ſeparated and removed at an infinite diſtance from moral imperfection, and that which we call ſin; that is, there is no ſuch thing as malice, or envy, or hatred, or revenge, or impatience, or cruelty, or tyranny, or injuſtice, or falſhood, or unfaithfulneſs in GOD; or if there be any other thing that ſignifies ſin, and vice, and moral inperfection, holineſs ſignifies that the divine nature is at an infinite diſtance from all theſe, and poſſeſſed of the contrary perfections.

Therefore all thoſe texts that remove moral imperfection

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perfection from GOD, and declare the repugnancy of it to the divine nature, do ſet forth the holineſs of GOD. Jam. i. 13. "GOD cannot be tempted "with evil." Job viii. 3. "Doth GOD pervert judg- "ment, or doth the Almighty pervert juſtice?" Job xxxiv. 10, 12. "Far be it from GOD that he ſhould "do wickedneſs, and from the Almighty, that he "ſhould commit iniquity. Yea, ſurely, GOD will "not do wickedly, neither will the Almighty pervert "judgment." Rom. ix. 14. "Is there unrighteouſ- "neſs with GOD? GOD forbid." Zeph. iii. 5. "The "juſt LORD is in the midſt thereof, he will not do "iniquity." And ſo falſhood, and unfaithfulneſs, and inconſtancy, Deut. xxxii. 4. "A GOD of truth, "and without iniquity." 1 Sam. xv. 29. "The "ſtrength of Iſrael will not lie." Tit. i. 2. "In "hope of eternal life, which GOD, that cannot lie, "hath promiſed." Heb. vi. 18. "That by two "immutable things, in which it was impoſſible for "GOD to lie." Therefore you ſhall find, that holineſs is joined with all the moral perfections of the divine nature, or put for them. Hoſ. xi. 9. "I am "the holy One in the midſt of thee;" that is, "the "merciful One." Pſal. cxlv. 17. "The LORD is "righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works." Rom. vii. 12. "The commandment is holy, and "juſt, and good." Rev. iii. 7. "Theſe things "ſaith he that is holy, he that is true." Rev. vi. 10. "How long, O LORD, holy and true?" Pſalm cv. 42. "He remembered his holy promiſe," holy, that is, in reſpect of the faithfulneſs of it. Iſaiah lv. 3. "The ſure mercies of David; τὰ ὅσια, the "holy mercies of David," which will not fail.

So that the holineſs of GOD is not a particular, but an univerſal perfection, and runs through all the

moral perfections of the divine nature; it is the beauty of the divine nature, and the perfection of all his other perfections: take away this, and you bring an univerſal ſtain and blemiſh upon the divine nature; without holineſs, power would be an oppreſſion; and wiſdom, ſubtilty; and ſovereignty, tyranny; and goodneſs, malice and envy; and juſtice, cruelty; and mercy, fooliſh pity; and truth, falſhood. And therefore the ſcripture ſpeaks of this, as God's higheſt excellency and perfection. God is ſaid to be "glorious in holineſs:" Exod. xv. 11. Holineſs is called God's throne. Pſal. xlvii. 8. "He ſitteth "upon the throne of his holineſs." This is that which makes heaven: Iſaiah lxiii. 15. It is called "the habitation of his holineſs, and of his glory;" as if this were the very nature of God, and the ſum of his perfections. The knowledge of God is called "the knowledge of the holy One." Prov. ix. 10. "To be made partakers of a divine nature," and "to be made partakers of God's holineſs," are equivalent expreſſions. 2 Pet. iii. 4. Heb. xii. 10. And becauſe there is no perfection of God greater, therefore he is repreſented as ſwearing by this; Pſal. lx. 6. "God hath ſpoken in his holineſs. Pſal. lxxxix. 35. "Once have I ſworn by my holineſs." The angels and glorified ſpirits they ſum up the perfections of God in this, Iſa. vi. 3. "And one cried "unto another, and ſaid, holy, holy, holy is the "Lord of hoſts, the whole earth is full of his glo-"ry." Rev. iv. 8. "And they reſt not day and "night, ſaying, holy, holy, holy, Lord God "almighty, which was, and is, and is to come." There is no attribute of God ſo often repeated as this; in ſome copies it is nine times.

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II. I

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II. I ſhall endeavour to prove, that this perfection belongs to GOD:

Firſt, from the light of nature. The philoſophers, in all their diſcourſes of GOD, agree in this, that whatever ſounds like vice and imperfection, is to be ſeparated from the divine nature; which is to acknowledge his holineſs. Plato, ſpeaking of our likeneſs to GOD, ſaith, ὁμοίωσις δὲ δίκαιον καὶ ὅσιον μετὰ φρονήσεως γενέσθαι. Dan. iv. 9. King Nebuchadnezzar calls GOD by this title, "I know that "the ſpirit of the holy gods is in thee." In a word, whatever hath been produced to prove any of GOD's moral perfections, proves his holineſs.

Secondly, from ſcripture. There is no title more frequently given to GOD, in ſcripture, and ſo often ingeminated, as this of his holineſs. He is called holineſs itſelf, Iſaiah lxiii. 15. Where heaven is called "the habitation of his holineſs," that is, of GOD. His name is ſaid to be holy, Luke i. 49. "And "holy is his name." He is called "the holy One," Iſaiah xl. 25. "The holy One of Iſrael," Iſaiah xli. 20. "The holy One of Jacob," xlix. 23. He is ſaid to be "holy in all his works and promiſes." Pſal. cv. 42. "In all his ways and works," Pſal. cxlv. 17. This title is given to each of the three perſons in the bleſſed Trinity: to GOD the father in innumerable places: to GOD the ſon, Dan. ix. 24. "To anoint the moſt holy." The devil cannot deny him this title, Luke iv. 34. "I know thee who "thou art, the holy One of GOD:" and the Spirit of GOD hath this title conſtantly given it, the holy Ghoſt, or the holy Spirit, or the Spirit of holineſs. The ſcripture attributes this perfection in a peculiar manner to GOD, 1 Sam. ii. 2. "There is none holy "as the LORD." Rev. xv. 4. "For thou only art "holy."

" holy." Holineſs is a communicable perfection ; but no creature can partake of it in ſuch a manner and degree as the divine nature poſſeſſeth it. GOD is eternally holy, the fountain of holineſs ; the creatures are derivatively and by participation holy. GOD is eminently and tranſcendently ſo ; the creatures, in a finite degree. GOD is immutably ſo, it is impoſſible it ſhould be otherwiſe ; but no creature is out of an abſolute poſſibility of ſin. In this ſenſe it is ſaid, Job iv. 18. That " he putteth no truſt in his ſervants, " and his angels he chargeth with folly." And chap. xv. 15. " He putteth no truſt in his ſaints ; " yea, the heavens are not clean in his ſight." From all which I ſhall draw theſe inferences : SERM. CXLII.

1. If holineſs be a perfection of the divine nature, and a property of GOD ; if, in the notion of GOD, there be included an everlaſting ſeparation and diſtance from moral imperfection, an eternal repugnance to ſin and iniquity ; from hence we may infer, that there is an intrinſical good and evil in things ; and the reaſons and reſpects of moral good and evil do not depend upon any mutable, and inconſtant, and arbitrary principle, but are fixed and immutable, eternal and indiſpenſable. Therefore they do not ſeem to me to ſpeak ſo ſafely, who make the divine will, preciſely and abſtractedly conſidered, the rule of moral good and evil ; as if there were nothing good or evil in it's own nature antecedently to the will of GOD, but that all things are therefore good or evil becauſe GOD wills them to be ſo : for if this were ſo, goodneſs and righteouſneſs, and truth, and faithfulneſs, would not be eſſential, and neceſſary, and immutable properties of the divine nature, but accidental, and arbitrary, and uncertain, and mutable ; which is to ſuppoſe, that GOD, if he pleaſed, might

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be otherwiſe than good, and juſt, and true. For i theſe depend merely upon the will of GOD, and b not neceſſary or eſſential properties of the divine na ture, then the contrary of theſe, malice, and envy and unrighteouſneſs, and falſhood do not imply an eſſential repugnancy to the divine nature; which plainly contrary to what the ſcripture tells us, th: "GOD cannot be tempted with evil;" that "it "impoſſible he ſhould lie," that he "cannot be un "righteous."

If any man ſay that GOD hath now declared him ſelf to be juſt, and good, and faithful, and now I cannot be otherwiſe, becauſe "he is a GOD of truth "and he changeth not;" this is to grant the thing for this ſuppoſeth the veracity and immutability c GOD to be eſſential and neceſſary perfections of th divine nature; and why not juſtice and goodneſs a well? I ſay, it ſuppoſeth veracity and immutability to be eſſential perfections, and not to depend upon the will of GOD; that is, that GOD cannot will to be otherwiſe than true and unchangeable: for if he could, what aſſurance can we poſſibly have, but that when he declares himſelf to be good, and juſt, he is or may be otherwiſe?

But I need not inſiſt upon this, which ſeems to be ſo very clear, and to carry it's own evidence along with it. I will only uſe this argument to prove it, and ſo leave it. No being can will it's own nature and eſſential perfections, that is, chuſe whether it will be thus, or otherwiſe; for that were to ſuppoſe it to be before it is, and before it hath a being, to deliberate about it's own nature. Therefore, if this be the nature of GOD, (which, I think, no body will deny) to be good, and juſt, and true, and neceſſarily to be what he is; then goodneſs, and juſtice, and

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truth do not depend upon the will of GOD, but there are ſuch things, ſuch notions antecedently to any act of the divine will. And this does no way prejudice the liberty of GOD; for this is the higheſt perfection, to be neceſſarily good, and juſt, and true; and a liberty or poſſibility to be otherwiſe is impotency and imperfection. For liberty no where ſpeaks perfection, but where the things and actions about which it is converſant are indifferent; in all other things it is the higheſt perfection not to be free and indifferent, but immutable and fixed, and neceſſarily bound up by the eternal laws of goodneſs, and juſtice, and truth, ſo that it ſhall not be poſſible to ſwerve from them; and this is the perfection of the divine nature, which we call his holineſs. SERM. CXLII.

2. If holineſs be the chief excellency and perfection of the divine nature, this ſhews us what account we are to make of ſin, and wickedneſs, and vice. We may judge of every privation by the habit, for they bear an exact proportion one to another. Light and darkneſs are oppoſed, as habit and privation; if light be pleaſant and comfortable, then darkneſs is diſmal and horrid. And ſo holineſs and ſin are oppoſed: if holineſs be the higheſt perfection of any nature, then ſin is the grand imperfection, and the loweſt debaſement of any being; becauſe it is the moſt oppoſite to that, and at the furtheſt diſtance from that which is the firſt excellency and perfection.

This ſhould rectify our judgment and eſteem of things and perſons. We admire and eſteem riches, and power, and greatneſs; and we ſcorn and contemn poverty, and weakneſs, and meanneſs; yea, grace and holineſs, if it be in the company of theſe. We are apt to reverence and value the great, and the rich, and the mighty of this world, though they be

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wicked, and to deſpiſe the poor man's wiſdom an holineſs; but we make a falſe judgment of thing and perſons. There is nothing that can be a foun dation of reſpect, that ought to command our rev rence and eſteem, but real worth, and excellenc and perfection; and according to the degrees of thi we ought to beſtow our reſpect, and raiſe our eſteen What St. James ſaith of reſpect of perſons, I m apply in this caſe, James ii. 4. "Are ye not the "partial your ſelves, and become judges of ev "thoughts?" We are extremely partial; we mak a falſe judgment, and reaſon ill concerning thing when we admire gilded vices, and wickedneſs exa ted to high places; I mean, ungodly rich men, ar ungodly great men; for wicked men are proper ungodly, unlike to GOD, and when we contemn poo and mean, and afflicted holineſs and piety. Were b our eyes open, and our judgment clear and unprej diced, we ſhould ſee a beauty and reſplendency i goodneſs; even when it is under the greateſt diſad vantage, when it is clothed with rags, and ſits u on a dunghill, it would ſhine through all theſe miſt and we ſhould ſee a native light and beauty in i through the darkneſs of a poor and low condition and we ſhould ſee wickedneſs to be a moſt vile an abject thing, when it appears in all it's gallantry an bravery; we ſhould look upon the poor righteou man, as "more excellent than his neighbour;" an the profane gallant, as the "off-ſcouring of th "earth." We ſhould value a man that "doe "juſtice, and loves mercy, and ſpeaks the truth to "his neighbour;" we ſhould eſteem any one more upon the account of any one of theſe ſimple qualities than we ſhould another man deſtitute of theſe, up on the account of an hundred titles of houour, an

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ten thouſand acres of land. A wicked, unholy man, he is a vile perſon, who deſerves to be contemned; and an holy man, he is the right honourable; Pſal. xv. 4. "In whoſe eyes a vile perſon is "contemned; but he honoureth them that fear the "LORD." The vile perſon is oppoſed to him that fears the LORD. He that is bold to affront GOD, and ſin againſt him, is the baſe and ignoble perſon. GOD himſelf, who is poſſeſſed of all excellency and perfection, and therefore knows beſt how to judge of theſe, he tells us, how we ſhould value our ſelves and others, Jer. ix. 23, 24. "Let not the wiſe "man glory in his wiſdom, neither let the mighty "man glory in his might; let not the rich man "glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth, glory "in this, that he underſtandeth and knoweth me, "that I am the LORD which exerciſe loving-kind-"neſs, judgment, and righteouſneſs in the earth; "for in theſe things I delight, ſaith the LORD." To know theſe divine qualities and perfections, ſignifies here, to underſtand them ſo as to imitate them. I do not ſpeak this, to bring down the value of any that are advanced in this world, or to leſſen the reſpect which is due to them; I would have nothing undervalued but wickedneſs and vice: and I would have thoſe who have ſtore of worldly advantages to recommend them, to add religion to their riches, and holineſs to their honour, that they may be current for their intrinſick value, rather than for the image and picture of worth which the world hath ſtamped upon them.

3. If holineſs be the chief excellency and perfection of the divine nature, then what an abſurd and unreaſonable thing is it, to ſcorn and deſpiſe holineſs, to mock and deride men under this very title!

SERM. CXLII. The world is much blinded, that they do not ſi great evil of ſin, and the beauty and excellen holineſs: but that men ſhould be ſo infatuate to change the nature of things, and to miſtake t of ſo vaſt difference, as ſin, and holineſs; to " good evil, and evil good;" that ſin, which vileſt thing in the world, ſhould be eſteemec cheriſhed, accounted a piece of gallantry, an koned amongſt the excellencies and accom ments of human nature; and holineſs, which great a perfection, ſhould be a name of hatre diſgrace, to be contemned and perſecuted; tha which is the glory of heaven, and the moſt ra perfection of the divine nature, ſhould be mat ſcorn and contempt; as the apoſtle ſpeaks in an caſe, "behold! ye deſpiſers, and wonder, an "riſh." Do ye think the holy and juſt GOD put up theſe affronts and indignities? Ye d only deſpiſe men, but ye deſpiſe GOD alſo. cannot contemn that which GOD accounts his g without reviling the divine nature, and offerin ſpite to GOD himſelf. The malice reacheth he and is levelled againſt GOD, whenever ye ſlight lineſs.

4. If GOD be a holy GOD, and hath ſuch a re nancy in his nature to ſin, then this is matter o ror to wicked men. The holy GOD cannot but ſin, and be an enemy to wickedneſs: and the h of GOD is terrible. We dread the hatred of a man; becauſe where hatred is backed with po the effects of it are terrible. But the hatred of almighty and eternal GOD, is much more drea becauſe the effects of it are greater, and more laſ than of the hatred of a weak mortal man. We k the utmoſt they can do; "they can but kill the

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" dy; after that, they have no more than they can " do:" they cannot hurt our ſouls; they cannot follow us beyond the grave, and purſue us into another world: but the effects of God's hatred and diſpleaſure are mighty and laſting, they extend themſelves to all eternity: for who knoweth the power of his anger? Who can tell the utmoſt of what omnipotent juſtice can do to ſinners? " It is a dreadful thing " to fall into the hands of the living God;" becauſe he that lives for ever, can puniſh for ever. We are miſerable, if God do not love us. Thoſe words, " my ſoul ſhall have no pleaſure in him," ſignify great miſery, and expreſs a dreadful curſe: but it is a more poſitive expreſſion of miſery, for God to hate us; that ſignifies ruin and deſtruction to the utmoſt; Pſal. v. 4. " Thou art not a God that " hath pleaſure in wickedneſs, neither ſhall evil " dwell with thee." This is a μειωσις, and expreſſeth leſs than is intended. God is far from being of an indifferent negative temper towards ſin and wickedneſs; therefore the pſalmiſt adds, " thou hateſt all " the workers of iniquity;" and then, in the next verſe, to ſhew what is the effect of God's hatred, " thou ſhalt deſtroy them that ſpeak leaſing." Therefore, ſinner, fear and tremble at the thoughts of God's holineſs.

5. Imitate the holineſs of God: this is the inference here in the text, " be ye holy, for I am holy." Holineſs in one word, contains all the imitable perfections of God: and when it is ſaid, " be ye holy;" it is as much as if he had ſaid, be ye good, and patient, and merciful, and true, and faithful; for I am ſo. Therefore religion is called " the knowledge " of the holy One," Prov. ix. 10. and chap. xxx. 3. And our imitation of God is expreſſed by our

SERM. CXLII. "putting on the new man, which after GOD is "created in righteouſneſs and true holineſs," Eph. iv. 24. Seeing then this is the chief excellency and perfection of GOD, and the ſum of all the perfections which we are to imitate, and wherein we are to endeavour to be like GOD, let us conform our ſelves to the holy GOD; endeavour to be habitually holy, which is our conformity to the nature of GOD; and actually holy, which is our conformity to the will of GOD. I will not enlarge upon this, becauſe I have preſſed the imitation of theſe particular perfections, goodneſs, patience, juſtice, truth, and faithfulneſs upon other texts. I ſhall only mention two arguments, to excite and quicken our deſires and endeavour after holineſs.

1. Holineſs is an imitation of the higheſt excellency and perfection. Holineſs, I told you, ſignifies a ſeparation from ſin and vice, and all moral imperfection, and, conſequently, doth comprehend and take in all the moral perfections of the divine nature, the goodneſs, and mercy, and patience, and juſtice, and veracity, and faithfulneſs of GOD; now theſe are the very beauty and glory of the divine nature. The firſt thing that we attribute to GOD, next to his being, is his goodneſs, and thoſe other attributes which have a neceſſary connection with it; his greatneſs and majeſty is nothing elſe but the glory which reſults from his united perfections, eſpecially from his goodneſs, and thoſe perfections which are akin to it. Separate from GOD theſe perfections, which holineſs includes in it, and what would be left but an omnipotent evil, an eternal being, infinitely knowing, and infinitely able to do miſchief? which is as plain and notorious a contradiction, and as impoſſible a thing, as can be imagined: ſo that if we have any ſparks

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of ambition in us, we cannot but aſpire after holi- SERM. CXLII.
neſs, which is ſo great an excellency and perfection of God himſelf. There is a vulgar prejudice againſt holineſs, as if it were a poor, mean thing, and below a great and generous ſpirit; whereas holineſs is the only true greatneſs of mind, the moſt genuine nobility, and the higheſt gallantry of ſpirit; and however it be deſpiſed by men, it is of a heavenly extraction, and divine original. Holineſs is the firſt part of the character of "the wiſdom that is from above;" Jam. iii. 17. "the wiſdom that is from above, is "firſt pure, then peaceable, gentle, and eaſy to be "entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, with- "out partiality, and without hypocriſy."

2. Holineſs is an eſſential and principal ingredient of happineſs. Holineſs is a ſtate of peace and tranquility, and the very frame and temper of happineſs; and without it, the divine nature, as it would be imperfect, ſo it would be miſerable. If the divine nature were capable of envy, or malice, or hatred, or revenge, or impatience, or cruelty, or injuſtice, or unfaithfulneſs, it would be liable to vexation and diſcontent, than which nothing can be a greater diſturbance of happineſs: ſo that holineſs is neceſſary to our felicity and contentment; not only to the happineſs of the next life, but to our preſent peace and contentment. If reaſonable creatures could be happy, as brute beaſts are in their degree, by enjoying their depraved appetites, and following the dictates of ſenſe and fancy, God would not have bound us up to a law and rule, but have left us as he hath done unreaſonable creatures, to ſatisfy our luſts and appetites, without check and controul: but angels and men, which are reaſonable creatures, have the notions of good and evil, of right and wrong, of come-

lineſs

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lineſs and filthineſs, ſo woven and twiſted into their very natures, that they can never be wholly defaced, without the ruin of their beings; and therefore it is impoſſible that ſuch creatures ſhould be happy otherwiſe, than by complying with theſe notions, and obeying the natural dictates and ſuggeſtions of their minds; which if they neglect, and go againſt, they will naturally feel remorſe and torment in their own ſpirits; their minds will be uneaſy and unquiet, and they will be inwardly grieved and diſpleaſed with themſelves for what they have done. So the apoſtle tells us, Rom. i. that even the moſt degenerate heathens had conſciences, which did accuſe or excuſe them, according as they obeyed, or did contrary to the dictates of natural light. GOD therefore, who knows our frame, hath ſo adapted his law to us, which is the rule of holineſs, that if we live up to it, we ſhall avoid the unſpeakable torment of a guilty conſcience; whereas, if we do contrary to it, we ſhall always be at diſcord with our ſelves, and in a perpetual diſquiet of mind: for nothing can do contrary to the law of it's being, that is, to it's own nature, without diſpleaſure and reluctancy; the conſequence of which, in moral actions, is guilt; which is nothing elſe but the trouble and diſquiet which ariſeth in one's mind, from conſciouſneſs of having done ſomething that contradicts the perfective principle of his being, that is, ſomething which did not become him, and which, being what he is, that is, a reaſonable creature, he ought not to do.

So that in all reaſonable creatures there is a certain kind of temper and diſpoſition that is neceſſary and eſſential to happineſs, and that is holineſs; which, as it is the perfection, ſo it is the great felicity of the divine nature: and, on the contrary, this is one

chief

chief part of the miſery of thoſe wicked, accurſed ſpirits the devils, and of unholy men, that they are of a temper contrary to God, they are envious, and malicious, and wicked; that is, of ſuch a temper as is naturally a torment and diſquiet to itſelf: and here the foundation of hell is laid in the evil diſpoſitions of our ſpirits; and till that be cured, which can only be done by holineſs, it is as impoſſible for a wicked man to be happy and contented in himſelf, as it is for a ſick man to be at eaſe; and the external preſence of God, and local heaven, would ſignify no more to make a wicked man happy and contented, than heaps of gold, and concerts of muſick, and a well-ſpread table, and a rich bed, would contribute to a man's eaſe in the paroxyſms of a fever, or in a violent fit of the ſtone. If a ſenſual, or covetous, or ambitious man were in heaven, he would be like "the rich man in hell," he would be tormented with a continual thirſt, and burnt up in the flames of his own ardent deſires, and would not meet with the leaſt drop of ſuitable pleaſure and delight to quench and allay the heat: the reaſon is, becauſe ſuch a man hath that within him, which torments him, and he cannot be at eaſe till that be removed. Sin is the violent, and unnatural, and uneaſy ſtate of our ſoul; every wicked man's ſpirit is out of order, and till the man be put into a right frame by holineſs, he will be perpetually diſquieted, and can have no reſt within himſelf. The prophet fitly deſcribes the condition of ſuch a perſon, Iſa. lvii. 20, 21. "But the wicked are like the troubled ſea, when "it cannot reſt, whoſe waters caſt forth mire and "dirt: There is no peace, ſaith my God, to the "wicked." So long as a man is unholy, ſo long as filthineſs and corruption abound in his heart, they will be reſt-

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reſtleſly working, like wine which is in a perpetual motion and agitation, till it have purged itſelf of it's dregs and foulneſs. Nothing is more turbulent and unquiet than the ſpirit of a wicked man; it is like the ſea, when it roars and rages through the ſtrength of contrary winds; it is the ſcene of furious luſts, and wild paſſions, which as they are contrary to holineſs, ſo they maintain perpetual conteſts and feuds among themſelves.

All ſin ſeparates us from GOD, who is the foundation of our happineſs. Our limited nature, and the narrowneſs of our beings, will not permit us to be happy in our ſelves: it is peculiar to GOD to be his own happineſs; but man, becauſe he is finite, and therefore cannot be ſelf-ſufficient, is carried forth by an innate deſire of happineſs, to ſeek his felicity in GOD. So that there is in the nature of man a ſpring of reſtleſs motion, which, with great impatience, forceth him out of himſelf, and toſſes him to and fro, till he comes to reſt in ſomething that is ſelf-ſufficient. Our ſouls, when they are ſeparated from GOD, like the unclean ſpirit in the goſpel, when it was caſt out, "wander up and down in dry "and deſart places, ſeeking reſt, but finding none." Were the whole world calm about a man, and did it not make the leaſt attempt upon him, were he free from the fears of divine vengeance, yet he could not be ſatisfied with himſelf; there is ſomething within him that will not let him be at reſt, but would tear him from his own foundation and conſiſtency; ſo that when we are once broken off from GOD, the ſenſe of inward want doth ſtimulate and force us to ſeek our contentment elſewhere. So that nothing but holineſs, which re-unites us to GOD, and reſtores our ſouls to their primitive and original ſtate, can

make us happy, and give peace and reſt to our ſouls: and this is the conſtant voice and language of ſcripture, and the tenor of the bible; "Acquaint now "thy ſelf with him, and be at peace," Job xxii. 21. "Light is ſown for the righteous, and gladneſs for "the upright in heart," Pſal. xcvii. 11. "The "work of righteouſneſs ſhall be peace; and the ef- "fect of righteouſneſs, quietneſs and aſſurance for "ever," Iſa. xxxii. 17. SERM. CXLII

Seeing then holineſs is ſo high a perfection, and ſo great a happineſs, let theſe arguments prevail with us to aſpire after this temper, that "as he who hath "called us is holy, ſo we may be holy in all manner "of converſation, becauſe it is written, be ye holy, "for I am holy."

SERMON CXLIII.

The goodneſs of GOD.

PSAL. cxlv. 9.

The LORD *is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works.*

THE ſubject which I have now propoſed to treat of, is certainly one of the greateſt and nobleſt arguments in the world, the goodneſs of GOD; the higheſt and moſt glorious perfection of the beſt and moſt excellent of beings, than which nothing deſerves more to be conſidered by us, nor ought in reaſon to affect us more. The goodneſs of SERM. CXLIII.

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GOD is the cauſe, and the continuance of our being the foundation of our hopes, and the fountain of o happineſs; our greateſt comfort, and our faireſt e ample, the chief object of our love, and praiſe, a admiration, the joy and rejoicing of our hearts; a therefore the meditation and diſcourſe of it mu needs be pleaſant and delightful to us: the great di ficulty will be, to confine our ſelves upon ſo copio an argument, and to ſet bounds to that which is ſo vaſt an extent, "the LORD is good to all, a "his tender mercies are over all his works."

Which words are an argument, which the divi pſalmiſt uſeth, to ſtir up himſelf and others to t praiſe of GOD: at the 3d verſe he tells us, th "the LORD is great, and greatly to be praiſed; and he gives the reaſon of this, verſe 8. and 9. fro thoſe properties and perfections of the divine natu which declare his goodneſs, "the LORD is gracio and full of compaſſion, ſlow to anger, and "great mercy: the LORD is good to all, and h "tender mercies are over all his works:" where yo have the goodneſs of GOD declared, together wi the amplitude and extent of it, in reſpect of t objects of it; "the LORD is good to all."

In the handling of this argument, I ſhall do the fou things:

Firſt, conſider what is the proper notion of goo neſs, as it is attributed to GOD.

Secondly, ſhew that this perfection belongs to G

Thirdly, conſider the effects and the extent of i

Fourthly, anſwer ſome objections which m ſeem to contradict and bring in queſtion the goodn of GOD.

Firſt, what is the proper notion of goodneſs, a is attributed to GOD.

Th

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There is a dry metaphyſical notion of goodneſs, which only ſignifies the being and eſſential properties of a thing: but this is a good word ill beſtowed; for in this ſenſe, every thing that hath being, even the devil himſelf, is good.

And there is a moral notion of goodneſs; and that is twofold:

1. More general, in oppoſition to all moral evil and imperfection, which we call ſin and vice; and ſo the juſtice, and truth, and holineſs of GOD are, in this ſenſe, his goodneſs. But there is,

2. Another notion of moral goodneſs, which is more particular and reſtrained; and then it denotes a particular virtue, in oppoſition to a particular vice: and this is the proper and uſual acceptation of the word goodneſs; and the beſt deſcription I can give of it is this; that it is a certain propenſion and diſpoſition of mind, whereby a perſon is inclined to deſire and procure the happineſs of others; and it is beſt underſtood by it's contrary, which is an envious diſpoſition, a contracted and narrow ſpirit, which would confine happineſs to itſelf, and grudgeth that others ſhould partake of it, or ſhare in it; or a malicious and miſchievous temper, which delights in the harms of others, and to procure trouble and miſchief to them. To communicate and lay out our ſelves for the good of others, is goodneſs; and ſo the apoſtle explains doing good, by communicating to others, who are in miſery, or in want; Heb. xiii. 16. "but to do good, and to communi-"cate, forget not." The Jews made a diſtinction between a righteous and a good man: to which the apoſtle alludes, Rom. v. 7. "ſcarcely for a righte-"ous man will one die: yet peradventure for a "good man ſome would even dare to die." The

righteous

SERM. CXLIII. righteous man was he that did no wrong to others: and the good man, he who was not only not injurious to others, but kind and beneficial to them. So that goodneſs is a readineſs and diſpoſition to communicate the good and happineſs which we enjoy, and to be willing others ſhould partake of it.

This is the notion of goodneſs among men; and it is the ſame in GOD, only with this difference, that GOD is originally and tranſcendently good; but the creatures are, the beſt of them, but imperfectly good, and by derivation from GOD, who is the fountain and original of goodneſs; which is the meaning of our SAVIOUR, Luke xviii. 19. when he ſays, "there is none good ſave one, that is GOD." But though the degrees of goodneſs in GOD, and the creatures, be infinitely unequal, and that goodneſs which is in us be ſo ſmall and inconſiderable that, compared with the goodneſs of GOD, it does not deſerve that name; yet the eſſential notion of goodneſs in both muſt be the ſame; elſe when the ſcripture ſpeaks of the goodneſs of GOD, we could not know the meaning of it; and if we do not at all underſtand what it is for GOD to be good, it is all one to us (for ought we know) whether he be good or not; for he may be ſo, and we never the better for it, if we do not know what goodneſs in GOD is, and conſequently when he is ſo, and when not.

Beſides that, the goodneſs of GOD is very frequently in ſcripture propounded to our imitation: but it is impoſſible for us to imitate that, which we do not underſtand what it is: from whence it is certain, that the goodneſs which we ought to endeavour after, is the ſame that is in GOD; becauſe in this we are commanded to imitate the perfection of GOD, that is, to be good and merciful as he is, according

o the rate and condition of creatures, and ſo far as SERM. CXLIII.
e, whoſe natures are imperfect, are capable of re-
mbling the divine goodneſs.

Thus much for the notion of goodneſs in God; is a propenſion and diſpoſition in the divine nature, communicate being and happineſs to his creatures.

Secondly, I ſhall endeavour to ſhew, in the next lace, that this perfection of goodneſs belongs to od; and that from theſe three heads:

I. From the acknowledgment of natural light.

II. From the teſtimony of ſcripture and divine evelation. And,

III. From the perfection of the divine nature.

I. From the acknowledgment of natural light. The generality of the heathen agree in it, and there s hardly any perfection of God more univerſally acknowledged by them. I always except the ſect of he Epicureans, who attribute nothing but eternity nd happineſs to the divine nature; and yet if they would have conſidered it, happineſs without goodneſs is impoſſible. I do not find that they do expreſly deny this perfection to God, or that they aſcribe o him the contrary; but they clearly take away all he evidence and arguments of the divine goodneſs; for they ſuppoſed God to be an immortal and happy being, that enjoyed himſelf, and had no regard to any thing without himſelf, that neither gave being to other things, nor concerned himſelf in the happineſs or miſery of any of them; ſo that their notion of a deity was, in truth, the proper notion of an idle being, that is called God, and neither does good nor evil.

But ſetting aſide this atheiſtical ſect, the reſt of the heathens did unanimouſly affirm and believe the goodneſs of God; and this was the great foundation of their religion; and all their prayers to God,

SERM. CXLIII. and praiſes of him, did neceſſarily ſuppoſe a perſuaſion of the divine goodneſs. Whoſoever prays to GOD, muſt have a perſuaſion or good hopes of his readineſs to do him good; and to praiſe GOD, is to acknowledge that he hath received good from him. Seneca hath an excellent paſſage to this purpoſe; "he "(ſays he) that denies the goodneſs of GOD, does "not, ſurely, conſider the infinite number of pray-"ers that, with hands lifted up to heaven, are put "up to GOD, both in private and publick; which "certainly would not be, nor is it credible, that all "mankind ſhould conſpire in this madneſs of putting "up their ſupplications to deaf and impotent deities, "if they did not believe that the gods were ſo good "as to confer benefits upon thoſe who prayed "to them."

But we need not infer their belief of GOD's goodneſs from the acts of their devotion, nothing being more common among them than expreſly to attribute this perfection of goodneſs to him; and among the divine titles, this always had the pre-eminence, both among the Greeks and Romans; ἰύς τε μέγας τε, *Deus optimus maximus*, was their conſtant ſtile; and in our language, the name of GOD ſeems to have been given him from his goodneſs. I might produce innumerable paſſages out of the heathen authors to this purpoſe; but I ſhall only mention that remarkable one out of Seneca; *primus deorum cultus eſt deos credere; deinde reddere illis majeſtatem ſuam, reddere bonitatem, ſine qua nulla majeſtas:* "The "firſt act of worſhip is to believe the being of GOD; "and the next, to aſcribe majeſty or greatneſs to "him; and to aſcribe goodneſs, without which there "can be no greatneſs."

II. From the teſtimony of ſcripture, and divine revelation.

revelation. I ſhall mention but a few of thoſe many texts of ſcripture, which declare to us the goodneſs of GOD, Exod. xxxiv. 6. where GOD makes his name known to Moſes; "The LORD, the LORD GOD, "merciful and gracious, long-ſuffering, and abun- "dant in goodneſs and truth." Pſal. lxxxvi. 5. "Thou, LORD, art good, and ready to forgive." Pſal. cxix. 68. "Thou art good, and doſt good." And that which is ſo often repeated in the book of Pſalms; "O give thanks unto the LORD, for he is "good, and his mercy endureth for ever." Our bleſſed SAVIOUR attributes this perfection to GOD, in ſo peculiar and tranſcendent a manner, as if it were incommunicable, Luke xviii. 19. "There is none "good, ſave one, that is GOD." The meaning is, that no creature is capable of it, in that excellent and tranſcendent degree, in which the divine nature is poſſeſſed of it. SERM. CXLIII.

To the ſame purpoſe are thoſe innumerable teſtimonies of ſcripture which declare GOD to be gracious and merciful, and long-ſuffering: for theſe are but ſeveral branches of his goodneſs: his grace is the freeneſs of his goodneſs to thoſe who have not deſerved it: his mercy is his goodneſs to thoſe who are in miſery: his patience is his goodneſs to thoſe who are guilty, in deferring the puniſhment due to them.

III. The goodneſs of GOD may likewiſe be argued from the perfection of the divine nature, theſe two ways:

1. Goodneſs is the chief of all perfections, and therefore it belongs to GOD.

2. There are ſome footſteps of it in the creatures, and therefore it is much more eminently in GOD.

1. Goodneſs is the higheſt perfection, and therefore it muſt needs belong to GOD, who is the moſt

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perfect of beings. Knowledge and power are great perfections; but ſeparated from goodneſs, they would be great imperfections, nothing but craft and violence. An angel may have knowledge and power in a great degree; but yet, for all that, be a devil. Goodneſs is ſo great and neceſſary a perfection, that without it, there can be no other; it gives perfection to all other excellencies: take away this, and the greateſt excellencies in any other kind, would be but the greateſt imperfections: and therefore our SAVIOUR ſpeaks of the goodneſs and mercy of God as the ſum of his perfections; what one evangeliſt hath, "be ye merciful, as your Father which is in "heaven is merciful," is rendered in another, "be "ye therefore perfect, as your father which is in "heaven is perfect." Goodneſs is ſo eſſential to a perfect being, that if we once ſtrip God of this property, we rob him of the glory of all his other perfections; and therefore when Moſes deſired to ſee God's glory, he ſaid, "he would make all his good"neſs to paſs before him." Exod. xxxiii. 19. This is the moſt amiable perfection, and, as it were, the beauty of the divine nature, Zach. ix. 17. "how "great is his goodneſs, and how great is his beauty! *ſine bonitate nulla majeſtas*, "without goodneſs there "can be no majeſty." Other excellencies may cauſe fear and amazement in us; but nothing but goodneſs can command ſincere love and veneration.

2. There are ſome footſteps of this perfection in the creatures, and therefore it muſt be much more eminently in God. There is in every creature ſome repreſentation of ſome divine perfection or other; but God doth not own any creature to be after his image, that is deſtitute of goodneſs. The creatures that want reaſon and underſtanding are incapable of

this moral goodneſs we are ſpeaking of; man is the firſt in the rank of creatures that is endowed with it, and he is ſaid to be "made after the image of "GOD, and to have dominion given him over the "creatures below him;" to ſignify to us, that if man had not been made after GOD's image, in reſpect of goodneſs, he had been unfit to rule over other creatures; becauſe, without goodneſs, dominion would be tyranny and oppreſſion; and the more any creature partakes of this perfection of goodneſs, the more it reſembles GOD; as the bleſſed angels, who "behold the face of GOD continually," and are thereby "transformed into his image, from glory "to glory," their whole buſineſs and employment is to do good; and the devil, though he reſembles GOD in other perfections of knowledge and power, yet becauſe he is evil, and envious, and miſchievous, and ſo contrary to GOD in this perfection, he is the moſt oppoſite and hateful to him of all creatures whatſoever.

And if this perfection be in ſome degree in the creature, it is much more in GOD; if it be derived from him, he is much more eminently poſſeſſed of it himſelf. All that goodneſs which is in the beſt natured of the ſons of men, or in the moſt glorious angels of heaven, is but an imperfect and weak repreſentation of the divine goodneſs.

The third thing I propoſed to conſider, was, the effects of the divine goodneſs, together with the large extent of it, in reſpect of the objects of it: "the "LORD is good to all, and his tender mercies are "over all his works; thou art good, and doeſt "good," ſays David, Pſal. cxix. 68. The great evidence and demonſtration of GOD's goodneſs, is from the effects of it. To the ſame purpoſe St. Paul

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ſpeaks, Acts xiv. 17. "He hath not left himſel "without witneſs, in that he doth good, and ſend "us rain from heaven, and fruitful ſeaſons."

I ſhall conſider the effects of the divine goodneſs under theſe two heads:

I. The univerſal extent of GOD's goodneſs to al his creatures.

II. I ſhall conſider more particularly the goodnes of GOD to men, which we are more eſpecially con cerned to take notice of.

I. The univerſal extent of his goodneſs to th whole creation; "the LORD is good to all." Th whole creation furniſheth us with clear evidences an demonſtrations of the divine goodneſs; which wa ſoever we caſt our eyes, we are encountered with un deniable inſtances of the goodneſs of GOD; and ever thing that we behold, is a ſenſible demonſtration c it; "the heavens declare the glory of GOD, an "the firmament ſheweth his handy-work," ſays th Pſalmiſt, Pſal. xix. 1. And again, Pſal. xxxiii. "The earth is full of the goodneſs of the LORD. The whole frame of this world, and every creatu in it, and all the ſeveral degrees of being and pe fection, which are in the creatures, and the prov dence of GOD towards them all, in the preſervatio of them, and providing for the happineſs of all c them in ſuch degrees as they are capable of it, are plentiful demonſtration of the divine goodneſs; whic I ſhall endeavour to illuſtrate in theſe four particular

1. The univerſal goodneſs of GOD appears, i giving being to ſo many creatures.

2. In making them all ſo very good; conſiderin the variety, and order, and end of them.

3. In his continual preſervation of them.

4. In providing ſo abundantly for the welfare an happine

happineſs of all of them, ſo far as they are capable and ſenſible of it. SERM. CXLIII.

1. The extent of GOD's goodneſs appears, in giving being to ſo many creatures. And this is a pure effect of goodneſs, to impart and communicate being to any thing. Had not GOD been good, but of an envious, and narrow, and contracted nature, he would have confined all being to himſelf, and been unwilling that any thing beſides himſelf ſhould have been; but his goodneſs prompted him to ſpread and diffuſe himſelf, and ſet his power and wiſdom on work, to give being to all that variety of creatures which we ſee and know to be in the world, and, probably, to infinite more than we have the knowledge of. Now it is not imaginable that GOD could have any other motive to do this, but purely the goodneſs of his nature. All the motives imaginable beſides this, muſt either be indigency and want, or conſtraint and neceſſity; but neither of theſe can have any place in GOD; and therefore it was mere goodneſs that moved him to give being to other things: and therefore all creatures have reaſon, with the four and twenty elders in the revelations, "to caſt their crowns before the throne of GOD, ſaying, Thou art worthy, "O LORD, to receive glory, and honour, and "power; for thou haſt created all things, and for "thy pleaſure (that is, of mere goodneſs) they are, "and were created."

(1.) Indigency and want can have no place in GOD; becauſe he that hath all poſſible perfection, hath all plenty in himſelf; from whence reſults all-ſufficiency and complete happineſs. So that the divine nature need not look out of itſelf for happineſs, being incapable of any addition to the happineſs and perfection it is already poſſeſſed of, *ipſe ſuis pollens*

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opibus, nihil indiga noſtri. We make things for ou
uſe, houſes to ſhelter us, and clothes to keep u
warm; and we propagate our kind, to perpetuat
ourſelves in our poſterity: but all this ſuppoſeth im
perfection, and want, and mortality; to none
which the divine nature is liable and obnoxious.

Nay, it was not want of glory which made Go
to make the world. It is true, indeed, the glor
of God's goodneſs doth herein appear; and cre
tures endowed with underſtanding have reaſon
take notice of it with thankfulneſs, praiſe, and adm
ration: but there is no happineſs redounds to G
from it, nor does he feed himſelf with any imagin
ry content and ſatisfaction, ſuch as vain-glorious pe
ſons have, from the fluttering applauſe of their cr
tures and beneficiaries. God is really "above
"bleſſing and praiſe." It is great condeſcenſion a
goodneſs in him, to accept of our acknowledgmen
of his benefits, of our imperfect praiſes, and ign
rant admiration of him; and were he not as wond
fully good, as he is great and glorious, he wou
not ſuffer us to ſully his great and glorious name,
taking it into our mouths; and were it not for o
advantage and happineſs to own and acknowledge
benefits, for any real happineſs and glory that com
to him by it, he could well enough be without
and diſpenſe with us for ever entertaining one thou
of him; and were it not for his goodneſs, might d
ſpiſe the praiſes of his creatures, with infinitely mo
reaſon than wiſe men do the applauſe of fools. The
is, indeed, one text of ſcripture which ſeems to i
timate that God made all creatures for himſelf, as if
he had ſome need of them, Prov. xvi. 4. "The
"Lord hath made all things for himſelf; yea, ev
"the wicked for the day of evil." Now if by God
makin

aking all things for himſelf, be meant, that he S 1
ned at and intended the manifeſtation of his wiſ- C.
m, and power, and goodneſs in the creation of
e world, it is moſt true that, in this ſenſe, he made
things for himſelf: but if we underſtand it ſo, as
the goodneſs of his nature did not move him there-
but he had ſome deſign to ſerve ends and neceſ-
es of his own upon his creatures, this is far from
n. But it is very probable, that neither of theſe
: the meaning of this text, which may be rendered,
th much better ſenſe, and nearer to the Hebrew,
as, "God hath ordained every thing to that
which is fit for it, and the wicked hath he ordain-
ed for the day of evil;" that is, the wiſdom of
D hath fitted one thing to another, puniſhment
ſin, the evil day to the evil doers.

(2.) Nor can neceſſity and conſtraint have any
ce in God. When there was no creature yet made,
hing in being but God himſelf, there could be
ning to compel him to make any thing, and to
rt from him the effects of his bounty: neither
he creatures neceſſary effects and emanations from
eing of God, flowing from the divine eſſence,
ter doth from a ſpring, and as light ſtreams
the ſun: if ſo, this, indeed, would have been
ument of the fulneſs of the divine nature, but
the bounty and goodneſs of it; and it would
een matter of joy to us that we are, but not
ground of thankfulneſs from us to God; as
ce and are glad that the ſun ſhines, but we
ive it any thanks for ſhining, becauſe it ſhines
any intention or deſign to do us good; it
know that we are the better for it's light,
ntend we ſhould be, and therefore we have
to acknowledge it's goodneſs to us.

But

SERM. CXLIII. But GOD, who is a ſpirit endowed with knowledge and underſtanding, does not act as natural and material cauſes do, which act neceſſarily and ignorantly; whereas he acts knowingly and voluntarily, with particular intention and deſign, knowing that he does good, and intending to do ſo freely, and out of choice, and when he hath no other conſtraint upon him but this, that his goodneſs inclines his will to communicate himſelf and to do good: ſo that the divine nature is under no neceſſity, but ſuch as is conſiſtent with the moſt perfect liberty, and freeſt choice.

Not but that goodneſs is eſſential to GOD, and a neceſſary perfection of his nature, and he cannot poſſibly be otherwiſe than good; but when he communicates his goodneſs, he knows what he does, and wills and chuſeth to do ſo.

And this kind of neceſſity is ſo far from being any impeachment of the divine goodneſs, that it is the great perfection and praiſe of it. The Stoick philoſophers miſtaking this, do blaſphemouſly advance their wiſe and virtuous man above GOD himſelf; for they reaſon thus; "A wiſe man is good out of "choice, when he may be otherwiſe; but GOD, "out of neceſſity of nature, and when he cannot "poſſibly be otherwiſe than good." But if they had conſidered things aright, they might have known that this is an imperfection in their wiſe man, that he can be otherwiſe than good; for a power to be evil is impotency and weakneſs. The higheſt character that ever was given of a man, is that which Velleius Paterculus gives of Cato, that he was *vir bonus, quia aliter eſſe non potuit*, "a good man, becauſe he could "not be otherwiſe:" this applied to a mortal man, is a very extravagant and undue commendation; but it ſignifies thus much, that it is the higheſt perfection,

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not to be able to be otherwiſe than good; and this is the perfection of the divine nature, that goodneſs is eſſential to it: but the expreſſions and communications of his goodneſs are ſpontaneous and free, deſigned and directed by infinite knowledge and wiſdom. SERM. CXLIII.

This is the firſt: the ſecond particular is, that God hath made all creatures very good, conſidering the variety, and order, and end of them. But this I ſhall reſerve to another opportunity.

SERMON CXLIV.

The goodneſs of God.

PSAL. cxlv. 9.

The Lord *is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works.*

IN the handling of this argument, I propoſed to do theſe four things: SERM. CXLIV.

Firſt, to conſider what is the proper notion of goodneſs, as it is attributed to God.

Secondly, to ſhew that this perfection belongs to God.

Thirdly, to conſider the effects of the divine goodneſs, together with the large extent of it, in reſpect of it's objects. And,

Fourthly, to anſwer ſome objections which may ſeem to contradict, and bring in queſtion the goodneſs of God.

I have conſidered the two firſt; and in ſpeaking to

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to the third, I propoſed the conſidering theſe t things:

I. The univerſal extent of GOD's goodneſs to his creatures.

II. More eſpecially the goodneſs of GOD to m which we are more eſpecially concerned to take tice of, and be affected with.

The firſt of theſe appears in theſe four particula

1. In his giving being to ſo many creatures.

2. In making them all ſo very good, conſideri the number and variety, the rank and order, the e and deſign of all of them.

3. In his continual preſervation of them.

4. In his providing ſo abundantly for the welf and happineſs of all of them, ſo far as they are pable and ſenſible of it.

The firſt of theſe I ſpoke largely to; I proce to ſhew in the

2d place, That the univerſal goodneſs of GOD pears, in making all theſe creatures ſo very go conſidering the number and variety, the rank and der, the end and deſign of all of them. His goo neſs excited and ſet a-work his power to make t world, and all the creatures in it; and that they mig be made in the beſt manner that could be, his w dom directed his power, "he hath made all thi "in number, weight, and meaſure;" ſo that t are admirably fitted and proportioned to one anoth and that there is an excellent contrivance in all ſo of beings, and a wonderful beauty and harmony the whole frame of things, is, I think, ſufficien viſible to every diſcerning and unprejudiced mi The loweſt form of creatures, I mean thoſe wh are deſtitute of ſenſe, do all of them contribu ſome way or other, to the uſe, and conveniency, a

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comfort of the creatures above them, which being endowed with ſenſe, are capable of enjoying the benefit and delight of them, which being ſo palpable in the greateſt part of them, may reaſonably be preſumed, though it be not ſo diſcernable concerning all the reſt; ſo that when we ſurvey the whole creation of GOD, and the ſeveral parts, we may well cry out with David, Pſal. civ. 24. "O LORD, how manifold are thy works? in wiſdom haſt thou made them all." SERM. CXLIV.

It is true, indeed, there are degrees of perfection in the creatures, and GOD is not equally good to all of them. Thoſe creatures which are of more noble and excellent natures, and to which he hath communicated more degrees of perfection, they partake more of his goodneſs, and are more glorious inſtances of it: but every creature partakes of the divine goodneſs in a certain degree, and according to the nature and capacity of it. GOD, if he pleaſed, could have made nothing but immortal ſpirits; and he could have made as many of theſe as there are individual creatures of all ſorts in the world: but it ſeemed good to the wiſe architect, to make ſeveral ranks and orders of beings, and to diſplay his power, and goodneſs, and wiſdom, in all imaginable variety of creatures; all which ſhould be good in their kind, though far ſhort of the perfection of angels and immortal ſpirits.

He that will build an houſe for all the uſes and purpoſes of which an houſe is capable, cannot make it all foundation, and great beams and pillars; muſt not ſo contrive it, as to make it all rooms of ſtate and entertainment: but there muſt of neceſſity be in it meaner materials, rooms and offices for ſeveral uſes and purpoſes, which, however inferior to the reſt in dignity and degree, do yet contribute to the beau-

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ty and advantage of the whole: ſo in this great frame of the world, it was fit there ſhould be variety, and different degrees of perfection in the ſeveral parts of it; and this is ſo far from being an impeachment of the wiſdom or goodneſs of him that made it, that it is an evidence of both: for the meaneſt of all GOD's creatures is good, conſidering the nature and rank of it, and the end to which it was deſigned; and we cannot imagine how it could have been ordered and framed better, though we can eaſily tell how it might have been worſe, and that if this or that had been wanting, or had been otherwiſe, it had not been ſo good; and thoſe who have been moſt converſant in the contemplation of nature, and of the works of GOD, have been moſt ready to make this acknowledgment.

But then if we conſider the creatures of GOD, with relation to one another, and with regard to the whole frame of things, they will all appear to be very good; and notwithſtanding this or that kind of creatures be much leſs perfect than another, and there be a very great diſtance between the perfection of a worm and of an angel; yet conſidering every thing in the rank and order which it hath in the creation, it is as good as could be, conſidering it's nature and uſe, and the place allotted to it among the creatures.

And this difference in the works of GOD, between the goodneſs of the ſeveral parts of the creation, and the excellent and perfect goodneſs of the whole, the ſcripture is very careful to expreſs to us in the hiſtory of the creation, where you find GOD repreſented, as firſt looking upon, and conſidering every day's work by itſelf, and approving it, and pronouncing it to be good, Gen. i. 4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25. at the end of every day's work, it is ſaid, that "GOD

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"ſaw it and it was good:" but then, when all was finiſhed, and he ſurveyed the whole together, it is ſaid, ver. 31. that "God ſaw every thing that "he had made, and behold it was very good:". very good, that is, the beſt; the Hebrews having no other ſuperlative. Every creature of God by itſelf is good: but take the whole together, and they are very good, the beſt that could be.

3. The univerſal goodneſs of God farther appears, in the careful and continual preſervation of the things which he hath made; his upholding and maintaining the ſeveral creatures in being, in their natural ſtate and order; thoſe which have life, in life, to the period which he hath determined and appointed for them; in his preſerving the whole world, his managing and governing this vaſt frame of things, in ſuch ſort, as to keep it from running into confuſion and diſorder. This is a clear demonſtration, no leſs of the goodneſs than of the wiſdom and power of God, that for ſo many ages all the parts of it have kept their places, and performed the offices and work for which nature deſigned them; that the world is not, in the courſe of ſo many thouſand years, grown old and weak, and out of repair, and that the frame of things do not diſſolve and fall in pieces.

And the goodneſs of God doth not only take care of the main, and ſupport the whole frame of things, and preſerve the more noble and conſiderable creatures, but even the leaſt and meaneſt of them. The providence of God doth not overlook any thing that he hath made, nor deſpiſe any of the works of his hands, ſo as to let them relapſe, and fall back into nothing, through neglect and inadvertency; as many as there are, he takes care of them all, Pſal. civ. 27, 28. where the pſalmiſt, ſpeaking of the innume-

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rable multitude of creatures upon the earth, and the ſea, "theſe (ſaith he) wait all upon thee, that th "mayeſt give them their meat in due ſeaſon; th "thou giveſt them, they gather; thou openeſt thi "hand, and they are filled with good." And the ſame purpoſe, Pſal. cxlv. 15, 16. "The eyes "all wait upon thee, and thou giveſt them th "meat in due ſeaſon; thou openeſt thine hand, a "ſatisfieſt the deſire of every living thing." T inanimate creatures, which are without ſenſe; a the brute creatures, which, though they have ſen are without underſtanding, and ſo can have no e and deſign of ſelf-preſervation, GOD preſerves the no leſs than men who are endowed with reaſon a foreſight to provide for themſelves; Pſal. xxxvi. "Thou preſerveſt man and beaſt." And Pſal. cxl 9. "He giveth to the beaſt his food, and to "young ravens which cry." And ſo our S VIOUR declares to us the particular providence GOD towards thoſe creatures, Matt. vi. 26. " "hold the fowls of the air: for they ſow not, r "ther do they reap, nor gather into barns; "your heavenly Father feedeth them." Ver. 28, "Conſider the lilies of the field how they gro "they toil not, neither do they ſpin: and yet I "unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory "not arrayed like one of theſe."

And though all the creatures below man, be without underſtanding, can take no notice of bounty of GOD to them, nor make any acknowle ments to him for it; yet man, who is the prieſt the viſible creation, and placed here in this g temple of the world, to offer up ſacrifices of p and thankſgiving to GOD, for his univerſal good to all his creatures, ought to bleſs GOD in their

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half, and to ſing praiſes to him, in the name of all the inferior creatures, which are ſubjected to his dominion and uſe; becauſe they are all, as it were, his family, his ſervants and utenſils; and if GOD ſhould neglect any of them, and ſuffer them to periſh and miſcarry, it is we that ſhould find the inconvenience and want of them; and therefore we ſhould on their behalf celebrate the praiſes of GOD; as we find David often does in the Pſalms, calling upon the inanimate and the brute creatures to praiſe the LORD.

4. The univerſal goodneſs of GOD doth yet farther appear, in providing ſo abundantly for the welfare and happineſs of all his creatures, ſo far as they are capable and ſenſible of it. He doth not only ſupport and preſerve his creatures in being, but takes care that they ſhould all enjoy that happineſs and pleaſure which their natures are capable of. The creatures endowed with ſenſe and reaſon, which only are capable of pleaſure and happineſs, GOD hath taken care to ſatisfy the ſeveral appetites and inclinations which he hath planted in them; and accordingly as nature hath enlarged their deſires and capacities, ſo he enlargeth his bounty towards them; "he "openeth his hand, and ſatisfieth the deſire of every "living thing." GOD doth not immediately bring meat to the creatures when they are hungry; but it is near to them, commonly in the elements wherein they are bred, or within their reach, and he hath planted inclinations in them to hunt after it, and to lead and direct them to it, and to encourge ſelf-preſervation, and to oblige and inſtigate them to it; and that they might not be melancholy and weary of life, he hath ſo ordered the nature of living creatures, that hunger and thirſt are moſt implacable deſires, exceeding painful, and even intolerable;

SERM. CXLIV. and likewiſe that the ſatisfaction of theſe appetites ſhould be a mighty pleaſure to them. And for thoſe creatures that are young, and not able to provide for themſelves, GOD hath planted in all creatures a στοργή, a natural affection towards their young ones, which will effectually put them upon ſeeking proviſions for them, and cheriſhing them, with that care and tenderneſs which their weak and helpleſs condition doth require: and reaſon is not more powerful and effectual in mankind to this purpoſe, than this natural inſtinct is in brute creatures; which ſhews what care GOD hath taken, and what proviſion he hath made in the natural frame of all his creatures, for the ſatisfaction of the inclinations and appetites which he hath planted in them; the ſatisfaction whereof is their pleaſure and happineſs. And thus I have done with the firſt head I propoſed, the univerſal extent of GOD's goodneſs to his creatures: let us now proceed, in the

IId place, to conſider more particularly the goodneſs of GOD to men; which we are more eſpecially concerned to take notice of, and to be affected with it. And we need go no farther than our own obſervation and experience, to prove the goodneſs of GOD; every day of our lives "we ſee and taſte that the "LORD is good;" all that we are, and all the good that we enjoy, and all that we expect and hope for, is from the divine goodneſs: "every good and every "perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from "the father of lights," Jam. i. 17. And the beſt and moſt perfect of his gifts he beſtows on the ſons of men. What is ſaid of the wiſdom of GOD, Prov. viii. may be applied to his goodneſs; the goodneſs of GOD ſhines forth in all the works of the creation, in the heavens and clouds above, and in the fountains of the great deep,

deep, in the earth and the fields, but "its delight "is with the ſons of men." Such is the goodneſs of GOD to man, that it is repreſented to us in ſcripture under the notion of love: GOD is good to all his creatures, but he is only ſaid to "love the ſons "of men." More particularly the goodneſs of GOD to man appears, SERM. CXLIV.

1. That he hath given us ſuch noble and excellent beings, and placed us in ſo high a rank and order of his creatures. We owe to him that we are, and what we are; we do not only partake of that effect of his goodneſs which is common to us with all other creatures, that we have received our being from him; but we are peculiarly obliged to him for his more eſpecial goodneſs, that he hath made us reaſonable creatures, of that kind which we ſhould have choſen to have been of, if we could ſuppoſe that, before we were, it had been referred to us, and put to our choice, what part we would be of this viſible world. But we did not contrive and chuſe this condition for our ſelves, we are no ways acceſſary to the dignity and excellency of our beings: but GOD choſe this condition for us, and made us what we are; ſo that we may ſay with David, Pſal. c. 3, 4, 5. "It is he "that hath made us, and not we our ſelves. O "enter into his gates with thankſgiving, and into "his courts with praiſe; be thankful unto him, "and ſpeak good of his name: for the LORD is "good." The goodneſs of GOD is the ſpring and fountain of our beings; but for that, we had been nothing; and but for his farther goodneſs, we might have been any thing of the loweſt and meaneſt rank of his creatures. But the goodneſs of GOD hath been pleaſed to advance us to be the top and perfection of the viſible creation; he hath been pleaſed to endow

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us with mind and underſtanding, and mad
pable of happineſs, in the knowledge, a
and enjoyment of himſelf. He hath curic
wonderfully wrought the frame of our bodi
to make them fit habitations for reaſonable ſ
immortal ſpirits; he hath made our very bc
ſels of honour, when of the very ſame clay
made innumerable other creatures of a mu
rank and condition: ſo that though man, i
of his body, be akin to the earth, yet, in
his ſoul, he is allied to heaven, of a divine
and deſcended from above. Of all the cr
this viſible world, man is the chief; and wh
of behemoth, or the elephant, Job xlii. i
of his great ſtrength, and the vaſt bigneſs o
dy, is only true abſolutely of man, that he
opificii caput; "the chief of the ways of G
"upon earth there is none like him."

The Pſalmiſt takes particular notice of t
neſs of God to man, in this reſpect of the e
and dignity of his being; Pſal. viii. 5.
"haſt made him little lower than the an
"haſt crowned him with glory and honou
this advantage of our nature above other
we ought thankfully to acknowledge; tho
men are ſo ſtupid as to overlook it; as El
plains, Job xxxv. 10, 11. "None ſaith,
"God my maker, who teacheth us more
"beaſts of the earth, and maketh us wiſe
"fowls of heaven?"

2. The goodneſs of God to man appear
he hath made and ordained ſo many things
our uſe. The beauty and uſefulneſs of the
below us, their plain ſubſerviency to our
and benefit, and delight, are ſo many clea

ces of the divine goodneſs to us, not only diſcernable to our reaſon, but even palpable to our ſenſes, ſo that we may "ſee and taſte that the LORD is gracious." SERM. CXLIV.

This David particularly inſiſts upon as a ſpecial ground of praiſe and thankſgiving to GOD, that he hath ſubjected ſo great a part of the creation to our dominion and uſe; Pſal. viii. 6, 7, 8. ſpeaking of man, "thou haſt made him to have dominion over "the works of thy hands; thou haſt put all things "under his feet: all ſheep and oxen, yea, and the "beaſts of the field: the fowl of the air, and the "fiſh of the ſea, and whatſoever paſſeth through the "paths of the ſeas." What an innumerable variety of creatures are there in this inferior world, which were either ſolely or principally made for the uſe and ſervice, pleaſure and delight of man! How many things are there, which ſerve for the neceſſity and ſupport, for the contentment and comfort of our lives! How many things for the refreſhment and delight of our ſenſes, and the exerciſe and employment of our underſtandings! That GOD hath not made man for the ſervice of other creatures, but other creatures for the ſervice of man, Epictetus doth very ingeniouſly argue from this obſervation; that the creatures below man, the brute beaſts, have all things in a readineſs, nature having provided for them meat, and drink, and lodging; ſo that they have no abſolute need that any ſhould build houſes, or make clothes, or ſtore up proviſion, or prepare and dreſs meat for them: "for, ſays he, being made for the "ſervice of another, they ought to be furniſhed "with theſe things, that they may be always in a "readineſs to ſerve their lord and maſter; a plain "evidence that they were made to ſerve man, and "not man to ſerve them."

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And to raiſe our thoughts of GOD's goodneſs to us the ſons of men yet higher, as he hath given us the creatures below us for our uſe and convenience; ſo hath he appointed the creatures above us for our guard and protection, not to ſay for our ſervice: Pſal. xxxiv. 7. "The angel of the LORD encampeth "round about them that fear him, and deliver-"eth them;" and then it follows, "O taſte and "ſee that the LORD is good!" and Pſal. xci. 11, 12. "He ſhall give his angels charge over thee, to "keep thee in all thy ways: they ſhall bear thee up "in their hands." Nay, the apoſtle ſpeaks as if their whole buſineſs and employment were to attend upon, and be ſerviceable to, good men; Heb. i. 14. "Are they not all miniſtring ſpirits, ſent forth "to miniſter for them who ſhall be heirs of ſalvation."

3. The goodneſs of GOD to men appears, in his tender love, and peculiar care of us above the reſt of the creatures, being ready to impart and diſpenſe to us the good that is ſuitable to our capacity and condition, and concerned to exempt us from thoſe manifold evils of want and pain, to which we are obnoxious: I do not mean an abſolute exemption from all ſorts and degrees of evil, and a perpetual tenure of temporal happineſs, and enjoyment of all good things; this is not ſuitable to our preſent ſtate, and the rank and order which we are in among the creatures; nor would it be beſt for us, all things conſidered. But the goodneſs of GOD to us above other creatures, is proportionable to the dignity and excellency of our natures above them; for, as the apoſtle reaſons in another caſe, "doth GOD take care "for oxen," and ſhall he not much more extend his care to man? To this purpoſe our SAVIOUR reaſons; Mat. vi. 26. "Behold the fowls of the air: "for

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" for they ſow not, neither do they reap, nor ga-
" ther into barns; yet your heavenly father feedeth
" them; are ye not much better than they?" And ver. 30. " Wherefore if GOD ſo clothe the graſs of
" the field, which to day is, and to morrow is caſt in-
" to the oven, ſhall he not much more clothe you?" and chap. x. 29, 30, 31. " Are not two ſparrows
" ſold for a farthing? and one of them ſhall not fall
" on the ground without your father. But the very
" hairs of your head are all numbred. Fear ye not
" therefore, ye are of more value than many ſpar-
" rows." It is true GOD hath a ſpecial care of his people and ſervants, above the reſt of mankind; but our SAVIOUR uſeth theſe arguments to his diſciples, to convince them of the providence of GOD towards them, as men, and of a more excellent nature than other creatures.

And indeed we are born into the world more deſtitute and helpleſs than other creatures; as if it were on purpoſe to ſhew, that GOD had reſerved us for his more peculiar care and providence; which is ſo great, that the ſcripture, by way of condeſcenſion, expreſſeth it to us by the name of love; ſo that what effects of care the greateſt and tendereſt affection in men is apt to produce towards one another, that, and much more, is the effect of GOD's goodneſs to us: and this affection of GOD is common to all men, (though, of all creatures, we have leaſt deſerved it) and is ready to diffuſe and ſhed abroad itſelf, whereever men are qualified for it by duty and obedience, and do not obſtruct and ſtop the emanations of it, by their ſins and provocations.

And though the greateſt part of mankind be evil, yet this doth not wholly put a ſtop to his goodneſs, though it cauſe many abatements of it, and hinder

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many good things from us: but ſuch is the goodneſs of GOD, notwithſtanding the evil and undutifulneſs of men, that he is pleaſed ſtill to concern himſelf in the government of the world, and to preſerve the ſocieties of men from running into utter confuſion and diſorder; notwithſtanding the violence and irregularities of men's wills and paſſions, the communities of men ſubſiſt upon tolerable terms; and notwithſtanding the rage and craft of evil men, poor and unarmed innocence and virtue is uſually protected, and, ſometimes, rewarded in this world, and domineering and outragious wickedneſs is very often remarkably checked and chaſtiſed. All which inſtances of GOD's providence, as they are greatly for the advantage and comfort of mankind, ſo are they an effectual declaration of that goodneſs which governs all things, and of GOD's kind care of the affairs and concernments of men; ſo that if we look no farther than this world, we may ſay with David, "Verily there is a reward for the righteous, verily "there is a GOD that judgeth the earth."

I know this argument hath been perverted to a quite contrary purpoſe; that if goodneſs governed the world, and adminiſtred the affairs of it, good and evil would not be ſo careleſly and promiſcuouſly diſpenſed; good men would not be ſo great ſufferers, nor wicked men ſo proſperous as many times they are.

But this alſo, if rightly conſidered, is an effect of GOD's goodneſs, and infinite patience to mankind, that "he cauſeth his ſun to riſe, and his rain to fall "upon the juſt and unjuſt;" that, upon the provocations of men, he does not give over his care of them, and throw all things into confuſion and ruin: this plainly ſhews, that he deſigns this life for the trial

rial of men's virtue and obedience, in order to the greater reward of it; and therefore "he ſuffers men 'to walk in their own ways," without any great check and controul, and reſerves the main bulk of rewards and puniſhments for another world: So that all this is ſo far from being any objection againſt the goodneſs of GOD, that, on the contrary, it is an argument of GOD's immenſe goodneſs, and infinite patience, that the world ſubſiſts and continues, and that he permits men to take their courſe, for the fuller trial of them, and the clearer and more effectual declaration of his juſtice, in the rewards and puniſhments of another life. SERM. CXLIV.

Fourthly and laſtly, the goodneſs of GOD to mankind moſt gloriouſly appears, in the proviſion he hath made for our eternal happineſs. What the happineſs of man ſhould have been, had he continued in innocency, is not particularly revealed to us; but this is certain, that by wilful tranſgreſſions we have forfeited all that happineſs which our natures are capable of. In this lapſed and ruinous condition of mankind, the goodneſs and mercy of GOD was pleaſed to employ his wiſdom for our recovery, and to reſtore us not only to a new but a greater capacity of glory and happineſs. And in order to this, the ſon of GOD aſſumes our nature for the recovery and redemption of man; and the pardon of ſin is purchaſed for us by his blood; eternal life, and the way to it, are clearly diſcovered to us. GOD is pleaſed to enter into a new and better covenant with us, and to afford us inward grace and aſſiſtance, to enable us to perform the conditions of it; and graciouſly to accept of our faith and repentance, of our ſincere reſolutions and endeavours of holineſs and obedience, for

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for perfect and complete righteouſneſs, for his ſak who "fulfilled all righteouſneſs."

This is the great and amazing goodneſs of Go to mankind, that when we were in open rebellio againſt him, he ſhould entertain thoughts of peac and reconciliation; and when he paſſed by the falle angels, he ſhould ſet his affection and love upon th ſinful and miſerable ſons of men. And "herein i "the love of GOD to men perfected," that as h hath made all creatures, both above us, and belo us, ſubſervient and inſtrumental to our ſubſiſtenc and preſervation; ſo, for the ranſom of our ſoul from eternal ruin and miſery, "he hath not ſpare "his own ſon, but hath given him up to death fo "us;" him, whom "he hath commanded all the "angels of GOD to worſhip," and to whom h hath made ſubject all creatures in heaven and earth; him, "who made the world," and "who upholds "all things by the word of his power, who is the "brightneſs of his glory, and the expreſs image of "his perſon."

And after ſuch a ſtupendous inſtance as this, what may we not reaſonably hope for, and promiſe our ſelves from the divine goodneſs? So the apoſtle hath taught us to reaſon; Rom. viii. 32. "He that ſpar"ed not his own ſon, but delivered him up for us "all, how ſhall he not with him alſo freely give us "all things?"

SER-

SERMON CXLV.

The goodneſs of God.

PSAL. cxlv. 9.

The LORD *is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works.*

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IN handling this argument, I proceed in this method:

Firſt, to conſider what is the proper notion of goodneſs.

Secondly, to ſhew that this perfection of goodneſs belongs to God.

Thirdly, I conſidered the effects of the divine goodneſs, under theſe heads:

I. The univerſal extent of it, in the number, variety, order, end, and deſign of the things created by him, and his preſervation, and providing for the welfare and happineſs of them.

II. I conſidered more particularly the goodneſs of God to mankind, of which I gave theſe four inſtances:

1. That he hath given us ſuch noble beings, and placed us in ſo high a rank and order of his creatures.

2. In that he hath made and ordained ſo many things chiefly for us.

3. In that he exerciſeth ſo peculiar a providence over us above the reſt, that though he is ſaid to be good to all, he is only ſaid to love the ſons of men.

4. In that he hath provided for us eternal life and happineſs. There only now remains the

Fourth and laſt particular to be ſpoken to, which was, to anſwer ſome objections which may ſeem to con-

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contradict and bring in queſtion the goodneſs of GOD; and they are many, and have (ſome of them eſpecially) great difficulty in them, and therefore it will require great conſideration and care, to give a clear and ſatisfactory anſwer to them, which undoubtedly they are capable of; the goodneſs of GOD being one of the moſt certain and unqueſtionable truths in the world. I ſhall mention thoſe which are moſt conſiderable and obvious, and do almoſt of themſelves ſpring up in every man's mind, and they are theſe four; the firſt of them more general, the other three more particular.

Firſt, If GOD be ſo exceeding good, whence comes it to paſs that there is ſo much evil in the world, of ſeveral kinds; evil of imperfection, evil of affliction or ſuffering, and (which is the greateſt of all others, and indeed the cauſe of them) evil of ſin?

Secondly, the doctrine of abſolute reprobation; by which is meant, the decreeing of the greateſt part of mankind to eternal miſery and torment, without any conſideration or reſpect to their ſin or fault: this ſeems notoriouſly to contradict, not only the notion of infinite goodneſs, but any competent meaſure and degree of goodneſs.

Thirdly, the eternal miſery and puniſhment of men for temporal faults, ſeems hard to be reconciled with that exceſs of goodneſs which we ſuppoſe to be in GOD.

Fourthly, the inſtances of GOD's great ſeverity to mankind, upon occaſion, in thoſe great calamities which, by the providence of GOD, have, in ſeveral ages, either befallen mankind in general, or particular nations; and here I ſhall confine myſelf to ſcripture inſtances, as being the moſt certain and remarkable, or at leaſt equal to any that are to be met with in hiſtory;

hiſtory; as the early and univerſal degeneracy of mankind, by the ſin and tranſgreſſion of our firſt parents; the deſtruction of the world by a general deluge; the ſudden and terrible deſtruction of Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them, by fire and brimſtone from heaven; the cruel extirpation of the Canaanites, by the expreſs command of GOD; and laſtly, the great calamities which befel the Jewiſh nation, and the final ruin and perdition of them at the deſtruction of Jeruſalem. SERM. CXLV.

Theſe are the objections againſt the goodneſs of GOD, which I ſhall ſeverally conſider, and, with all the brevity and clearneſs I can, endeavour to return a particular anſwer to them.

The firſt objection, which I told you is more general, is this; if GOD be ſo exceeding good, whence then comes it to paſs that there is ſo much evil in the world, of ſeveral kinds? It is evident beyond denial, that evil abounds in the world. "The whole world "lies in evil," ſays St. John, ἐν τῷ πονηρῷ κεῖται, "lies in wickedneſs," (ſo our tranſlation renders it) is involved in ſin; but by the article and oppoſition, St. John ſeems to intend the devil: "We know, ſays "he, that we are of GOD, and the whole world," ὁ τῷ πονηρῷ κεῖται, "is ſubject to the evil one," and under his power and dominion. Which way ſoever we render it, it ſignifies, that evil of one kind or other reigns in the world. Now, can evil come from a good GOD? "Out of the ſame mouth proceedeth "bleſſing and curſing? Doth a fountain ſend forth "at the ſame place ſweet water and bitter? This "cannot be," as St. James ſpeaks in another caſe. But all evils that are in the world, muſt either be directly procured by the divine providence, or permitted to happen; and next to the cauſing and procuring

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ing of evil, it ſeems to be contrary to the goodneſs of GOD, to permit that there ſhould be any ſuch thing, when it is in his power to help and hinder it.

Anſwer. To give an account of this: it was an ancient doctrine of ſome of the moſt ancient nations, that there were two firſt cauſes or principles of all things, the one of good things, the other of bad; which, among the Perſians, were called Oromaſdes and Arimanius; among the Egyptians, Oſiris and Typhon; among the Chaldeans, good or bad planets; among the Greeks Ζεὺς and Ἅιδης: Plutarch expreſly ſays, that the good principle was called GOD, and the bad, demon, or the devil; in conformity to which ancient traditions, the Manichees (a ſad ſect of Chriſtians) ſet up two principles, the one infinitely good, which they ſuppoſed to be the original cauſe of all good that is in the world; the other infinitely evil, to which they aſcribed all the evils that are in the world.

But beſides that the notion of an infinite evil is a contradiction, it would be to no purpoſe to ſuppoſe two oppoſite principles of equal power and force. That the very notion of an infinite evil is a contradiction, will be very clear, if we conſider, that what is infinitely evil, muſt be infinitely imperfect, and conſequently infinitely weak; and for that reaſon, though never ſo miſchievous and malicious, yet being infinitely weak, and ignorant, and fooliſh, would neither be in a capacity to contrive miſchief, nor to execute it. But admit that a being infinitely miſchievous were infinitely cunning, and infinitely powerful, yet it could do no evil; becauſe the oppoſite principle of infinite goodneſs, being alſo infinitely wiſe and powerful, they would tie up one another's hands: ſo that, upon this ſuppoſition, the notion of a deity would

ould ſignify juſt nothing, and by virtue of the eter- SERM.
al oppoſition and equality of theſe two principles, CXLV.
ey would keep one another at a perpetual bay, and,
eing an equal match for one another, inſtead of be-
ig two deities, they would be two idols, able to do
either good or evil.

But to return a more diſtinct and ſatisfactory an-
wer to this objection: there are three ſorts of evil
n the world; the evil of imperfection; the evil of
ffliction and ſuffering; and the evil of ſin.

And 1ſt, for the evil of imperfection, I mean, na-
ural imperfections; theſe are not ſimply and abſolute-
y, but only comparatively evil: now comparative
vil is but a leſs degree of goodneſs; and it is not at
ll inconſiſtent with the goodneſs of GOD, that ſome
reatures ſhould be leſs good than others, that is,
mperfect in compariſon of them; nay, it is very
greeable both to the goodneſs and wiſdom of GOD,
hat there ſhould be this variety in the creatures, and
hat they ſhould be of ſeveral degrees of perfection,
eing made for ſeveral uſes and purpoſes, and to be
ubſervient to one another, provided they all contri-
ute to the harmony and beauty of the whole.

Some imperfection is neceſſarily involved in the
ery nature and condition of a creature, as that it
erives it's being from another, and neceſſarily de-
ends upon it, and is beholden to it, and is likewiſe
f neceſſity finite and limited in it's nature and per-
ections; and as for thoſe creatures which are leſs
erfect than others, this alſo, that there ſhould be
egrees of perfection, is neceſſary, upon ſuppoſition,
hat the wiſdom of GOD thinks fit to diſplay itſelf in
ariety of creatures of ſeveral kinds and ranks. For
hough, comparing the creatures with one another,
e angelical nature is beſt, and moſt perfect; yet it

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is abſolutely beſt, that there ſhould be other creatures beſides angels. There are many parts of the creation which are raſhly and inconſiderately by us concluded to be evil and imperfect, as ſome noxious and hurtful creatures, which yet in other reſpects, and to ſome purpoſes, may be very uſeful, and againſt the harm and miſchief whereof we are ſufficiently armed, by ſuch means of defence, and ſuch antidotes, as reaſon and experience are able to find and furniſh us withal; and thoſe parts of the world which we think of little or no uſe, as rocks and deſerts, and that vaſt wilderneſs of the ſea, if we conſider things well, are of great uſe to ſeveral very conſiderable purpoſes; or if we can diſcern no other uſe of them, they ſerve at leaſt to help our dulneſs, and to make us more attentively to conſider, and to admire the perfection and uſefulneſs of the reſt; at the worſt, they may ſerve for foils to ſet off the wiſe order and contrivance of other things, and (as one expreſſeth it very well) they may be like a blackmoor's head in a picture, which gives the greater beauty to the whole piece.

2dly, For the evils of affliction and ſuffering; and theſe either befal brute creatures, or men endowed with reaſon and conſideration.

1ſt, For thoſe which befal the brute creatures; thoſe ſufferings which nature inflicts upon them are very few; the greateſt they meet withal are from men, or upon their account, for whoſe ſake they were chiefly made, and to whoſe reaſonable uſe and gentle dominion they are conſigned.

It is neceſſary, from the very nature of theſe creatures, that they ſhould be paſſive, and liable to pain; and yet it doth in no wiſe contradict either the wiſdom or goodneſs of God to make ſuch creatures, becauſe

becauſe all theſe pains are, for the moſt part, fully recompenſed by the pleaſure theſe creatures find in life; and that they have ſuch a pleaſure and happineſs in life, is evident, in that all creatures, notwithſtanding the miſeries they endure, are ſtill fond of life, and unwilling to part with it: no creature but man (who only hath perverted his nature) ever ſeeks the deſtruction of itſelf; and ſince all brute creatures are ſo loth to go out of being, we may probably conclude, that if they could deliberate whether they ſhould be, or not, they would chuſe to come into being, even upon theſe hard conditions. SERM. CXLV.

But however that be, this we are ſure of, that they ſuffer chiefly from us, and upon our account; we, who are their natural lords, having depraved our ſelves firſt, are become cruel and tyrannical to them; nay, the ſcripture tells us, that they ſuffer for our ſakes, and that "the whole creation groaneth, and is in bondage" for the ſin of man. And this is not unreaſonable, that being made principally for man, they ſhould ſuffer upon his account, as a part of his goods and eſtate; not as a puniſhment to them (which, under the notion of puniſhment, they are not capable of) but as a puniſhment to him who is the lord and owner of them, they being by this means become more weak and frail, and leſs uſeful and ſerviceable to him for whom they were made; ſo that the ſufferings of the creatures below us are, in a great meaſure, to be charged upon us, under whoſe dominion GOD hath put them.

2dly, As for the afflictions and ſufferings which befal men, theſe are not natural and of GOD's making, but the reſult and fruit of our own doings, the effects and conſequences of the ill uſe of our own liberty, and free choice; and GOD does not willingly

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ſend them upon us, but we wilfully pull them down upon ourſelves; for "he doth not afflict willingly, "nor grieve the children of men," as the prophet tells us, Lam. iii. 33. Or, as it is in the Wiſdom of Solomon, Chap. i. 12, 13. "GOD made not death, "neither hath he pleaſure in the deſtruction of the "living; but men pull deſtruction upon themſelves, "with the works of their own hands." All the evils that are in the world, are either the effects of our own ſin, as poverty, and diſgrace, pains, diſeaſes, and death, which are ſometimes more immediately inflicted upon men by a viſible providence and hand of GOD, but are uſually brought upon us by ourſelves, in the natural courſe and order of things; or they are the effects of other men's ſins, brought upon us by the ambition and covetouſneſs, by the malice and cruelty of others: and theſe evils, though they are procured and cauſed by others, yet they are deſerved by ourſelves; and though they are immediately from the hand of men, yet we ought to look farther, and conſider them as directed and diſpoſed by the providence of GOD; as David did when Shimei curſed him; "GOD (ſaith he) hath bid him "curſe David," though it immediately proceeded from Shimei's inſolence and ill-nature.

Now upon the ſuppoſition of ſin, the evils of affliction and ſuffering are good, becauſe they are of great uſe to us, and ſerve to very good ends and purpoſes.

1. As they are the proper puniſhments of ſin. Evil is good to them that do evil; that is, it is fit and proper, juſt and due: Pſal. cvii. 17. "Fools, becauſe "of their tranſgreſſion, and becauſe of their iniqui-"ties, are afflicted." And it is fit they ſhould be ſo; crooked to crooked is ſtreight and right. "A rod

"for

" for the back of fools," ſaith Solomon; and elſe- SERM.
where, " God hath made every thing for that which CXLV.
" is fit for it, and the evil day for the wicked man."

2dly, As they are the preventions and remedies of greater evils. Evils of affliction and ſuffering are good for wicked men, to bring them to a ſenſe of their ſin, and to reclaim them from it, and thereby to prevent greater temporal evils, and preſerve them from eternal miſery; and not only good to the perſon that ſuffers, but likewiſe to others, to deter and affright them from the like ſins; to prevent the contagion of ſin, and to ſtop the progreſs of iniquity, upon which greater guilt and worſe miſchiefs might enſue; and they are good to good men, to awaken and rouze them out of their ſecurity, to make them know God and themſelves better; they are almoſt a neceſſary diſcipline for the beſt of men, much more for evil and depraved diſpoſitions; and we might as reaſonably expect that there ſhould be no rod in a ſchool, as that there ſhould be no ſuffering and afflictions in the world.

3dly, As they are the occaſions and matter of many virtues. God teacheth men temperance by want, and patience by reproach and ſufferings, charity by perſecution, and pity and compaſſion to others by grievous pains upon our ſelves. The benefit of afflictions, to them that make a wiſe uſe of them, is unſpeakable; they are grievous in themſelves, " nevertheleſs (ſaith the apoſtle to the Hebrews) " they bring forth the peaceable fruits of " righteouſneſs, to them that are exerciſed there- " with." David gives a great teſtimony of the mighty benefit and advantage of them, from his own experience; Pſal. cxix. 67. " Before I was afflicted, " I went aſtray, but now have I kept thy word."

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And ver. 71. "It is good for me that I have been "afflicted, that I might learn thy ſtatutes."

4thly, The evils of ſuffering, patiently ſubmitted to, and decently borne, do greatly contribute to the increaſe of our happineſs. All the perſecutions and ſufferings of good men in this life, "do work for us "a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glo- "ry." And if they contribute to our greater good and happineſs at laſt, they are good. The glorious reward of the ſufferings which we have met with in this life, will in the next clear up the goodneſs and juſtice of the divine providence from all thoſe miſts and clouds which are now upon it, and fully acquit it from thoſe objections which are now raiſed againſt it, upon account of the afflictions and ſufferings of good men in this life, which "are not worthy to "be compared with the glory which ſhall be re- "vealed in them."

III. As for the evil of ſin, which is the great difficulty of all, how is it conſiſtent with the goodneſs of GOD, to permit ſo great an evil as this to come into the world? For anſwer to this, I deſire theſe two things may be conſidered:

1. That it doth not at all contradict the wiſdom or goodneſs of GOD, to make a creature of ſuch a frame, as to be capable of having it's obedience tried, in order to the reward of it; which could not be, unleſs ſuch a creature were made mutable, and, by the good or bad uſe of it's liberty, capable of obeying or diſobeying the laws of his Creator: for where there is no poſſibility of ſinning, there can be no trial of our virtue and obedience; and nothing but virtue and obedience are capable of reward. The goodneſs of GOD towards us is ſufficiently vindicated, in that he made us capable of happineſs, and gave us

us ſufficient direction and power for the attaining of that end; and it does in no wiſe contradict his goodneſs, that he does not, by his omnipotency, interpoſe to prevent our ſin: for this had been to alter the nature of things, and not to let man be the creature he made him, capable of reward or puniſhment, according to the good or bad uſe of his own free choice. It is ſufficient that GOD made man good at firſt, though mutable, and that he had a power to have continued ſo, though he wilfully determined himſelf to evil: this acquits the goodneſs of GOD, that "he made man upright, but he found out" to himſelf "many inventions." SERM. CXLV.

2. If there had not been ſuch an order and rank of creatures as had been in their nature mutable, there had been no place for the manifeſtation of GOD's goodneſs in a way of mercy and patience: ſo that though GOD be not the author of the ſins of men, yet, in caſe of their wilful tranſgreſſion and diſobedience, the goodneſs of GOD hath a fair opportunity of diſcovering itſelf, in his patience and long-ſuffering to ſinners, and in his merciful care and proviſion for their recovery out of that miſerable ſtate. And this may ſuffice for anſwer to the firſt objection, if GOD be ſo good, whence then comes evil?

The ſecond objection againſt the goodneſs of GOD, is from the doctrine of abſolute reprobation: by which I mean the decreeing the greateſt part of mankind to eternal miſery and torment, without any conſideration or reſpect to their ſin and fault. This ſeems not only notoriouſly to contradict the notion of infinite goodneſs, but to be utterly inconſiſtent with the leaſt meaſure and degree of goodneſs. Indeed, if by reprobation were only meant, that GOD, in his own infinite knowledge, foreſees the ſins and

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wickedneſs of men, and hath from all eternity determined in himſelf, what in his word he hath ſo plainly declared, that he will puniſh impenitent ſinners with everlaſting deſtruction; or if by reprobation be meant, that GOD hath not elected all mankind, that is, abſolutely decreed to bring them infallibly to ſalvation: neither of theſe notions of reprobation is any ways inconſiſtent with the goodneſs of GOD; for he may foreſee the wickedneſs of men, and determine to puniſh it, without any impeachment of his goodneſs: he may be very good to all, and yet not equally and in the ſame degree: if GOD pleaſe to bring any infallibly to ſalvation, this is tranſcendent goodneſs; but if he put all others into a capacity of it, and uſe all neceſſary and fitting means to make them happy, and, after all this, any fall ſhort of happineſs through their own wilful fault and obſtinacy; theſe men are evil and cruel to themſelves, but GOD hath been very good and merciful to them.

But if by reprobation be meant, either that GOD hath decreed, without reſpect to the ſins of men, their abſolute ruin and miſery; or that he hath decreed that they ſhall inevitably ſin and periſh; it cannot be denied, but that ſuch a reprobation as this doth clearly overthrow all poſſible notion of goodneſs. I have told you, that the true and only notion of goodneſs in GOD is this, that it is a propenſion and diſpoſition of the divine nature, to communicate being and happineſs to his creatures: but ſurely nothing can be more plainly contrary to a diſpoſition to make them happy, than an abſolute decree, and a peremptory reſolution to make them miſerable. GOD is infinitely better than the beſt of men, and yet none can poſſibly think that man a good man, who ſhould abſolutely reſolve to diſinherit and deſtroy his children,

children, without the foreſight and conſideration of any fault to be committed by them. We may talk of the goodneſs of God; but it is not an eaſy matter to deviſe to ſay any thing worſe than this of the devil. SERM. CXLV.

But it is ſaid, reprobation is an act of ſovereignty in God, and therefore not to be meaſured by the common rules of goodneſs. But it is contrary to goodneſs, and plainly inconſiſtent with it; and we muſt not attribute ſuch a ſovereignty to God, as contradicts his goodneſs; for if the ſovereignty of God may break in at pleaſure upon his other attributes, then it ſignifies nothing to ſay, that God is good, and wiſe, and juſt, if his ſovereignty may at any time act contrary to theſe perfections.

Now if the doctrine of abſolute reprobation, and the goodneſs of God, cannot poſſibly ſtand together, the queſtion is, which of them ought to give way to the other? What St. Paul determines in another caſe, concerning the truth and fidelity of God, will equally hold concerning his goodneſs: "Let God "be good, and every man a liar." The doctrine of abſolute reprobation is no part of the doctrine of the holy ſcriptures, that ever I could find; and there's the rule of our faith. If ſome great divines have held this doctrine, not in oppoſition to the goodneſs of God, but hoping they might be reconciled together, let them do it if they can; but if they cannot, rather let the ſchools of the greateſt divines be called in queſtion, than the goodneſs of God, which, next to his being, is the greateſt and cleareſt truth in the world.

Thirdly, it is farther objected, that the eternal puniſhment of men, for temporal faults, ſeems hard to be reconciled with that exceſs of goodneſs, which we ſuppoſe to be in God. This

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This objection I have fully anſwered, in a diſcourſe upon St. Matthew, chap. xxv. 46. and therefore ſhall proceed to the

Fourth and laſt objection againſt the goodneſs of GOD, from ſundry inſtances of GOD's ſeverity to mankind, in thoſe great calamities which, by the providence of GOD, have in ſeveral ages either befallen mankind in general, or particular nations.

And here I ſhall confine myſelf to ſcripture inſtances, as being moſt known, and moſt certain and remarkable, or at leaſt equally remarkable with any that are to be met with in any other hiſtory; ſuch are the early and univerſal degeneracy of all mankind, by the ſin and tranſgreſſion of our firſt parents; the deſtruction of the world by a general deluge; the ſudden and terrible deſtruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them, by fire and brimſtone from heaven; the cruel extirpation of the Canaanites by the expreſs command of GOD; and, laſtly, the great calamities which befel the Jewiſh nation, eſpecially the final ruin and diſperſion of them at the deſtruction of Jeruſalem. Theſe, and the like inſtances of GOD's ſeverity, ſeem to call in queſtion his goodneſs.

Againſt theſe ſevere and dreadful inſtances of GOD's ſeverity, it might be a ſufficient vindication of his goodneſs to ſay in general, that they were all upon great and high provocations; and moſt of them, after long patience and forbearance, and with a great mixture of mercy, and a declared readineſs in GOD to have prevented or removed them, upon repentance; all which are great inſtances of the goodneſs of GOD: but yet, for the clearer manifeſtation of the divine goodneſs, I ſhall conſider them particularly, and as briefly as I can,

1. As

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1. As for the tranſgreſſion of our firſt parents, and the diſmal conſequences of it to all their poſterity; This is a great depth, and though the ſcripture mentions it, yet it ſpeaks but little of it; and in matters of mere revelation, we muſt not attempt "to be wiſe above what is written." Thus much is plain, that it was an act of high and wilful diſobedience to a very plain and eaſy command; and that, in the puniſhment of it, GOD mitigated the extremity of the ſentence (which was preſent death) by granting our firſt parents the reprieve of almoſt a thouſand years: and as to the conſequences of it to their poſterity, GOD did not, upon this provocation, abandon his care of mankind; and though he removed them out of that happy ſtate and place in which man was created, yet he gave them a tolerable condition and accommodations upon earth: and, which is certainly the moſt glorious inſtance of divine goodneſs that ever was, he was pleaſed to make the fall and miſery of man, the happy occaſion of ſending his ſon in our nature, for the recovery and advancement of it to a much happier and better condition than that from which we fell. So the apoſtle tells us at large, Rom. v. that the grace of GOD, by JESUS CHRIST, hath redounded much more to our benefit and advantage, than the ſin and diſobedience of our firſt parents did to our prejudice.

2. For the general deluge, though it look very ſevere, yet if we conſider it well, we may plainly diſcern much of goodneſs in it; it was upon great provocation, by the univerſal corruption and depravation of mankind: "The earth was filled with vio-"lence, and all fleſh had corrupted it's ways; the "wickedneſs of man was great upon the earth, and "every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was "only

SERM. CXLV. " only evil continually;" which is not a deſcription of original ſin, but of the actual and improved wickedneſs of mankind: and yet when the wickedneſs of men was come to this height, GOD gave them fair warning, before he brought this calamity upon them, " when the patience of GOD waited in " the days of Noah," for the ſpace of " an hundred " and twenty years;" at laſt, when nothing would reclaim them, and almoſt the whole race of mankind were become ſo very bad, that it is ſaid, " it repent- " ed the LORD that he had made man upon the " earth, and it grieved him at his heart;" when things were thus extremely bad, and like to continue ſo, GOD, in pity to mankind, and to put a ſtop to their growing wickedneſs and guilt, ſwept them away all at once from the face of the earth, except one family, which he had preſerved from this contagion, to be a new ſeminary of mankind, and, as the heathen poet expreſſeth it, *mundi melioris origo*, " the ſource and original of a better race."

3. For that terrible deſtruction of Sodom and Gomorrah by fire and brimſtone from heaven, it was not brought upon them till " the cry of their ſin was " great, and gone up to heaven;" till by their unnatural luſts they had provoked ſupernatural vengeance. And it is very remarkable, to what low terms GOD was pleaſed to condeſcend to Abraham for the ſparing of them; Gen. xviii. 32. if in thoſe five cities there had been found " but ten righteous perſons, he " would not have deſtroyed them for thoſe ten's ſake." So that we may ſay with the apoſtle, " Behold the " goodneſs and ſeverity of GOD!" Here was wonderful goodneſs mixed with this great ſeverity.

4. For the extirpation of the Canaanites, by the expreſs command of GOD, which hath ſuch an appearance

pearance of ſeverity, it is to be conſidered, that this vengeance was not executed upon them, till they were grown ripe for it. God ſpared them for above four hundred years, for ſo long their growing impiety is taken notice of, Gen. xv. 16. where it is ſaid, That "the iniquity of the Amorites was not yet full:" God did not proceed to cut them off, till their caſe was deſperate, paſt all hopes of recovery, till "the "land was defiled with abominations," and ſurcharged with wickedneſs, to that degree, as "to "ſpue out it's inhabitants;" as is expreſly ſaid, Levit. xviii. 28. When they were arrived to this pitch, it was no mercy to them to ſpare them any longer, to heap up more guilt and miſery to themſelves. SERM. CXLV.

Fifthly and laſtly, as for the great calamities which God brought upon the Jews, eſpecially in their final ruin and diſperſion at the deſtruction of Jeruſalem; not to inſiſt upon the known hiſtory of their multiplied rebellions and provocations, of their deſpiteful uſage of God's prophets, whom he ſent to warn them of his judgments, and to call them to repentance; of their obſtinate refuſal to receive correction, and to be brought to amendment, by any means that God could uſe; for all which provocations, he at laſt delivered them into their enemies hands, to carry them away captive: not to inſiſt upon this, I ſhall only conſider their final deſtruction by the Romans, which though it be dreadfully ſevere, beyond any example of hiſtory, yet the provocation was proportionable; for this vengeance did not come upon them, till they had, as it were, extorted it, by the moſt obſtinate impenitency and unbelief, in "reject-"ing the counſel of God againſt themſelves," and reſiſting ſuch means as would have brought Tyre and Sidon, Sodom and Gomorrah to repentance; till

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till they had deſpiſed the doctrine of life and ſalvation, delivered to them by the ſon of GOD, and confirmed from heaven by the cleareſt and greateſt miracles; and by wicked hands had crucified and ſlain the ſon of GOD, and the SAVIOUR of the world. Nay, even after this greateſt of ſins that ever was committed, GOD waited for their repentance forty years, to ſee if in that time they would be brought to a ſenſe of their ſins, and "to know the things which be-"longed to their peace." And no wonder if, after ſuch provocations, and ſo much patience, and ſo obſtinate an impenitency, the goodneſs of GOD at laſt gave way to his juſtice, and "wrath came upon "them to the utmoſt."

So that all theſe inſtances, rightly conſidered, are rather commendations of the divine goodneſs, than juſt and reaſonable objections againſt it; and notwithſtanding the ſeverity of them, it is evident that GOD is good, from the primary inclinations of his nature; and ſevere only upon neceſſity, and in caſe of juſt provocation. And to be otherwiſe, not to puniſh inſolent impiety and incorrigible wickedneſs in a ſevere and remarkable manner, would not be goodneſs, but a fond indulgence; not patience, but ſtupidity; not mercy to mankind, but cruelty: becauſe it would be an encouragement to them to do more miſchief, and to bring greater miſery upon themſelves.

So that if we ſuppoſe GOD to be holy and juſt, as well as good, there is nothing in any of theſe inſtances, but what is very conſiſtent with all that goodneſs which we can ſuppoſe to be in a holy, and wiſe, and juſt governor, who is a declared enemy to ſin, and is reſolved to give all fitting diſcountenance to the breach and violation of his laws. It is neceſ-

ſary,

ſary, in kindneſs and compaſſion to the reſt of mankind, that ſome ſhould be made remarkable inſtances of GOD's ſeverity; that the puniſhment of a few may be a warning to all, "that they may hear and fear," and, by avoiding the like ſins, may prevent the like ſeverity upon themſelves. SERM. CXLV.

And now I have, as briefly as I could, explained and vindicated the goodneſs of GOD; the conſideration whereof is fruitful of many excellent and uſeful inferences, in relation both to our comfort and our duty: but theſe I ſhall refer to another opportunity.

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The goodneſs of GOD.

PSAL. cxlv. 9.

The LORD *is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works.*

I Have made ſeveral diſcourſes upon this argument, of the goodneſs of GOD; ſhewing what it is; on what accounts we aſcribe it to GOD; what are the effects and large extent of it to the whole creation, and more particularly to mankind; and, in the laſt place, conſidered the ſeveral objections which ſeem to lie againſt it. I proceed now to the application of this excellent argument, the conſideration whereof is ſo fruitful of uſeful inferences in relation both to our comfort and duty. And, SERM. CXLVI.

I. This ſhews us the prodigious folly and unreaſonableneſs of atheiſm. Moſt of the atheiſm that is in the world, doth not ſo much conſiſt in a firm perſuaſion

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ſuaſion that there is no GOD, as in vain wiſhes and deſires that there were none. Bad men think it would be a happineſs to them, and that they ſhould be in a much better condition, if there were no GOD, than if there be one. *Nemo Deum non eſſe credit, niſi cui Deum non eſſe expedit*; "no man is apt to diſbelieve "a GOD, but he whoſe intereſt it is that there ſhould "be none." And if we could ſee into the hearts of wicked men we ſhould find this lying at the bottom, that if there be a GOD, he is juſt and will puniſh ſin; that he is infinite in power, and not to be reſiſted, and therefore kills them with his terror ſo often as they think of him: hence they apprehend it their intereſt that there ſhould be no GOD, and wiſh there were none, and thence are apt to cheriſh in their minds a vain hope that there is none, and at laſt endeavour to impoſe upon themſelves by vain reaſonings, and to ſuppreſs the belief of a GOD, and to ſtifle their natural apprehenſions and fears of him. So that it is not *primus in orbe deos fecit timor*, "fear "that firſt made gods;" but the fear which bad men have of divine power and juſtice, that firſt tempted them to the diſbelief of him.

But were not theſe men as fooliſh as they are wicked, they would wiſh with all their hearts there were a GOD, and be glad to believe ſo: and the pſalmiſt gives them their true character, who can entertain any ſuch thoughts or wiſhes; Pſal. xiv. 1. "The "fool hath ſaid in his heart, there is no GOD:" for they are fools who do not underſtand nor conſult their true intereſt: and if this be true which I have ſaid concerning the goodneſs of GOD; if this be his nature, to deſire and procure the happineſs of his creatures; whoever underſtands the true nature of GOD and his own true intereſt, cannot but wiſh there were a GOD,

), and be glad of any argument to prove it, SERM. CXLVI.
ejoice to find it true; as children are glad of a
and tender father, and as ſubjects rejoice in a
nd good prince.

ıe goodneſs of GOD gives us a lovely character
m, makes him ſo good a father, ſo gracious a
nor of men, that if there were no ſuch being in
orld, it were infinitely deſirable to mankind that
ſhould be: he is ſuch an one, *qualem omne cupe-
ſi deeſſet*, "as, if he were wanting, all men
ght to wiſh for." The being of GOD is ſo
ortable, ſo convenient, ſo neceſſary to the felici-
mankind, that (as Tully admirably ſays) *Dii
tales ad uſum hominum fabricati penè videantur*,
GOD were not a neceſſary being of himſelf, he
ght almoſt ſeem to be made on purpoſe for the
: and benefit of men:" ſo that atheiſm is not
n inſtance of the moſt horrible impiety, but of
reateſt ſtupidity; and for men to glory in their
ief of a GOD, is like the rejoicing and tri-
ı of a furious and beſotted multitude, in the
er of a wiſe and good prince, the greateſt ca-
y and confuſion that could poſſibly have befal-
ıem.

the evidence of GOD's being were not ſo clear as
yet the conſideration of his goodneſs ought to
: all inclination to atheiſm and infidelity; for if
: as good as he is repreſented to us; both by
al light and divine revelation, (and he is ſo, as
ıs he is) if he tender our welfare, and deſire our
neſs, as much as we ourſelves can do, and uſe
ſe ways and proper means to bring it about,
it is plainly every man's intereſt, even thine, O
·! to whom, after all thy provocations, he is
g to be reconciled, that there ſhould be ſuch a

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being as GOD is; and whenever thou comeſt to thy ſelf, thou wilt be ſenſible of thy want of him, and thy "ſoul will thirſt for GOD, even the living GOD, "and pant after him as the hart pants after the wa- "ter brooks;" in the day of thy affliction and calamity, "when diſtreſs and anguiſh cometh upon "thee," thou wilt flee to GOD for refuge, and ſhelter thy ſelf under his protection, and wouldeſt not, for all the world, but there were ſuch a being in it to help and deliver thee. *Deos nemo ſanus timet* (ſays Seneca) *furor eſt metuere ſalutaria*; "no man "in his wits is afraid there is a GOD: it is a mad- "neſs to fear that which is ſo much for our benefit "and advantage." Human nature is conſcious to itſelf of it's own weakneſs and inſufficiency, and of it's neceſſary dependance upon ſomething without itſelf for it's happineſs, and therefore, in great extremity and diſtreſs, the atheiſt himſelf hath naturally recourſe to him; and he who denied and rejected him in his proſperity, clings to him in adverſity, as his "only ſupport and preſent help in time of trou- "ble." And this is a ſure indication, that theſe men, after all their endeavours to impoſe upon themſelves, have not been able wholly to extinguiſh in their minds the belief of GOD, and his goodneſs; nay, it is a ſign, that at the bottom of their hearts they have a firm perſuaſion of his goodneſs, when, after all their inſolent defiance of him, they have the confidence to apply themſelves to him for mercy and help, in time of need; and therefore our hearts ought to riſe with indignation againſt thoſe who go about to perſuade the belief of a thing ſo prejudicial to our intereſt, to take away "the light of our eyes, "and the breath of our noſtrils," and to rob us of all the comfort and ſupport, which the belief of an in-

: power, conducted by infinite wiſdom and eſs, is apt to afford to mankind. SERM. CXLVI.

We ſhould take great care of perverting and abu- is great goodneſs by vain confidence and pre- ion. This is a provocation of an high nature, the ſcripture calls, "turning the grace of God wantonneſs;" making that an encouragement which is one of the ſtrongeſt arguments in the againſt it. God is infinitely good and merci- but we muſt not therefore think, that he is fond dulgent to our faults; but, on the contrary, ſe he is good, he cannot but hate evil. So the re every where tells us, that "he is of purer s than to behold iniquity; that the face of the RD is againſt them that do evil: he is not a D that hath pleaſure in wickedneſs, neither ſhall l dwell with him: the fooliſh ſhall not ſtand his ſight; he hateth all the workers of iniqui- " He is ready to ſhew mercy to thoſe who alified for it by repentance, and reſolution of er courſe: but as long as we continue impeni- God is implacable, and will deal with us ac- g to the tenor of his laws, and the deſert of ings. Deſpair is a great ſin, but preſumption reater; deſpair doubts of the goodneſs of God, reſumption abuſeth it; deſpair diſbelieves, but nption perverts the beſt thing in the world to e contrary purpoſe from what it was intended.

. The conſideration of God's goodneſs is a ty comfort and relief to our minds, under all ars and troubles. Great are the fears and jea- s of many devout minds concerning God's love m, and their everlaſting condition; which are only founded in one of theſe two cauſes, a me- oly temper or miſtaken notions and apprehenſi-

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ons of GOD; and very often theſe two meet together, and hinder the cure and removal of one another.

Melancholy, as it is an effect of bodily temper, is a diſeaſe not to be cured by reaſon and argument, but by phyſick and time: but the miſtakes which men have entertained concerning GOD, if they be not ſet on and heightened by melancholy, (as many times they are) may be rectified by a true repreſentation of the goodneſs of GOD, confirmed by reaſon and ſcripture. Many good men have had very hard and injurious thoughts of GOD inſtilled into them, from doctrines too commonly taught and received; as if he did not ſincerely deſire the happineſs of his creatures, but had from all eternity decreed to make the greateſt part of mankind, with a ſecret purpoſe and deſign to make them miſerable, and, conſequently, were not ſerious and in good earneſt in his invitations and exhortations of ſinners to repentance; and it is no wonder if ſuch jealouſies as theſe concerning GOD, make men doubtful whether GOD love them, and very ſcrupulous and anxious about their everlaſting condition.

I have already told you that theſe harſh doctrines have no manner of foundation, either in reaſon or ſcripture; that GOD earneſtly deſires our happineſs, and affords us ſufficient means to that end; that he bears a more hearty good-will to us, than any man does to his friend, or any father upon earth ever did to his deareſt child; in compariſon of which, the greateſt affection of men to thoſe whom they love beſt, is "but as the drop of the bucket, as the very ſmall duſt "upon the balance." If we have right apprehenſions of GOD's goodneſs, we can have no temptation to deſpair of his kind and merciful intentions to us, provided we be but careful of our duty to him, and

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lo ſincerely repent and forſake our ſins. Plainer declarations no words can make, than thoſe we meet with in the holy ſcriptures, that "GOD hath no pleaſure in the death of the wicked, but rather that he ſhould turn from his wickedneſs and live;" that "he would have all men to be ſaved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth;" that "he is long ſuffering to us-ward, not willing that any ſhould periſh, but that all ſhould come to repentance;" that "he that confeſſeth and forſaketh his ſin, ſhall have mercy:" that "if the wicked forſake his ways, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and return unto the LORD, he will have mercy, and will abundantly pardon."

As for outward calamities and afflictions, the conſideration of GOD's goodneſs is a firm ground of conſolation to us, giving us aſſurance, that GOD will either prevent them by his providence, or ſupport us under them, or reſcue us out of them, or turn them to our greater good and happineſs in this world or the next. St. Paul ſpeaks of it as the firm belief and perſuaſion of all good men, that, in the iſſue, all afflictions ſhould prove to their advantage. "We know (ſays he) that all things ſhall work together for good to them that love GOD." And one of the greateſt evidences of our love to GOD, is a firm belief and perſuaſion of his goodneſs: if we believe his goodneſs, we cannot but love him; and if we love him, "all things ſhall work together for our good."

And this is a great cordial to thoſe who are under grievous perſecutions and ſufferings, which is the caſe of our brethren in a neighbouring nation, and may come to be ours, GOD knows how ſoon. But though the malice of men be great, and backed with a power not to be controlled by any viſible means,

SERM. CXLVI. and therefore likely to continue; yet the goodneſs of GOD is greater than the malice of men, and of a longer duration and continuance. And thus David comforted himſelf, when he was perſecuted by Saul, Pſal. lii. 1. "Why boaſteth thou thy ſelf in miſ-"chief, O mighty man? the goodneſs of GOD en-"dureth continually." The perſecution which Saul raiſed againſt him was very powerful, and laſted a long time; but he comforts himſelf with this, that "the goodneſs of GOD endures for ever."

IV. The conſideration of GOD's goodneſs, is a powerful motive and argument to ſeveral duties.

1. To the love of GOD. And this is the moſt proper and natural effect and operation of the goodneſs of GOD upon our minds. Several of the divine attributes are very awful, but goodneſs is amiable; and without this nothing elſe is ſo. Power and wiſdom may command dread and admiration; but nothing but goodneſs can challenge our love and affection. Goodneſs is amiable for itſelf, though no benefit and advantage ſhould from thence redound to us; but when we find the comfortable effects of it, when the riches of GOD's goodneſs, and long-ſuffering, and forbearance, are laid out upon us, when we live upon that goodneſs, and are indebted to it for all that we have and hope for; this is a much greater endearment to us of that excellency and perfection, which was amiable for itſelf. We cannot but love him who is good, and does us good; whoſe goodneſs extends to all his creatures, but is exerciſed in ſo peculiar a manner towards the ſons of men, that it is called love; and if GOD vouchſafe to ove us, well may this be the "firſt and great com-"mandment, Thou ſhalt love the Lord thy GOD with "all thine heart, and with all thy ſoul, and with all "thy mind."

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2. The conſideration of GOD's goodneſs is likewiſe an argument to us to fear him; not as a ſlave does his maſter, but as a child does his father, who the more he loves him, the more afraid he is to offend him. "There is forgiveneſs with thee (ſaith "the pſalmiſt) that thou mayeſt be feared;" becauſe GOD is ready to forgive, we ſhould be afraid to offend. "Men ſhall fear the LORD and his good-"neſs;" (ſaith the prophet) Hoſea iii. 5. And, indeed, nothing is more to be dreaded, than deſpiſed goodneſs, and abuſed patience, which turns into fury and vengeance: "deſpiſeſt thou the riches of his "goodneſs, and long-ſuffering, and forbearance, "(ſays the apoſtle) and treaſureſt up to thy ſelf wrath "againſt the day of wrath, and the revelation of the "righteous judgment of GOD?"

3. The conſideration of GOD's goodneſs, is a poweful motive to obedience to his laws, and (as the apoſtle expreſſeth it) "to walk worthy of the "LORD unto all well pleaſing, being fruitful in "every good work." This argument Samuel uſeth to the people of Iſrael, to perſuade them to obedience, 1 Sam. xii. 24. "Only fear the LORD, and "ſerve him in truth, with all your heart; for con-"ſider how great things he hath done for you."

And, indeed, the laws, which GOD hath given us, are none of the leaſt inſtances of his goodneſs to us, ſince they all tend to our good, and are proper cauſes and means of our happineſs: ſo that in challenging our obedience to his laws, as acknowledgments of our obligation to him for his benefits, he lays a new obligation, and confers a greater benefit upon us. All that his laws require of us, is to do that which is beſt for our ſelves, and does moſt directly conduce to our own welfare and happineſs.

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Conſidering our infinite obligations to GOD, he might have challenged our obedience to the ſevereſt and harſheſt laws he could have impoſed upon us; ſo that as the ſervants ſaid to Naaman, "Had the "prophet bid thee do ſome great thing, would'ſt thou "not have done it? how much more when he hath "only ſaid, waſh and be clean?" If GOD had required of us things very grievous and burthenſome; in love and gratitude to him, we ought to have yielded a ready and chearful obedience to ſuch commands: how much more when he hath only ſaid, Do this, and be happy? In teſtimony of your love to me do theſe things which are the greateſt kindneſs and benefit to your ſelves.

4. "The goodneſs of GOD" ſhould "lead men "to repentance." One of the greateſt aggravations of our ſins is, that we offend againſt ſo much goodneſs, and make ſo bad a requital for it; "Do ye "thus requite the LORD, O fooliſh people, and un-"wiſe!" The proper tendency of GOD's goodneſs and patience to ſinners, is to bring them to a ſenſe of their miſcarriage, and to a reſolution of a better courſe. When we reflect upon the bleſſings and favours of GOD, and his continual goodneſs to us, can we chuſe but be aſhamed of our terrible ingratitude and diſobedience? Nothing is more apt to make an ingenuous nature to relent, than the ſenſe of undeſerved kindneſs; that GOD ſhould be ſo good to us, who are evil and unthankful to him; that though we be enemies to him, yet "when we hunger, he feeds "us; when we thirſt, he gives us to drink;" heaping, as it were, "coals of fire on our heads," on purpoſe to melt us into repentance, and to overcome our evil by his goodneſs.

5. The conſideration of GOD's goodneſs, is a firm ground

ground of truſt and confidence. What may we not hope and aſſuredly expect from immenſe and boundleſs goodneſs? If we have right apprehenſions of the goodneſs of GOD, we cannot poſſibly diſtruſt him, or doubt of the performance of thoſe gracious promiſes which he hath made to us; the ſame goodneſs which inclined him to make ſuch promiſes, will effectually ingage him to make them good. If GOD be ſo good as he hath declared himſelf, why ſhould we think that he will not help us in our need, and relieve us in our diſtreſs, and comfort us in our afflictions and ſorrows? If we may with confidence rely upon any thing to confer good upon us, and to preſerve and deliver us from evil, we may truſt infinite goodneſs. SERM. CXLVI.

6. The goodneſs of GOD is, likewiſe, an argument to us to patience and contentedneſs with every condition. If the hand of GOD be ſevere and heavy upon us in any affliction, we may be aſſured that it is not without great cauſe that ſo much goodneſs is ſo highly offended and diſpleaſed with us; that he deſigns our good in all the evils he ſends to us, and does not chaſten us for his pleaſure, but for our profit; that we are the cauſe of our own ſufferings, and our ſins ſeparate between GOD and us, and withhold good things from us; that, in the final iſſue and reſult of things, "all things ſhall work together for "good" to us; and therefore we ought not to be diſcontented at any thing which will certainly end in our happineſs.

7. Let us imitate the goodneſs of GOD. The higheſt perfection of the beſt and moſt perfect being is worthy to be our pattern: This the ſcripture frequently propoſeth to us; Matth. v. 48. "Be ye "therefore perfect, even as your father which is

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" in heaven is perfect." How is that? in being good, and kind, and merciful, as GOD is. " But I " ſay unto you (ſays our LORD) love your enemies, " bleſs them that curſe you, do good to them that " hate you, and pray for them which deſpitefully " uſe you, and perſecute you; that you may be the " children of your father which is in heaven: for he " maketh his ſun to riſe on the evil, and on the good, " and ſendeth rain on the juſt, and on the unjuſt." And then it follows, " Be ye therefore perfect, even " as your father which is in heaven is perfect." The ſame pattern St. Paul propoſeth to us, Eph. iv. 32. and ch. v. 1. " Be ye kind one to another, tender " hearted; forgiving one another, even as GOD for " CHRIST's ſake hath forgiven you. Be ye there- " fore followers of GOD as dear children, and walk " in love." We cannot in any thing reſemble GOD more, than in goodneſs, and kindneſs, and mercy, and in a readineſs to forgive thoſe who have been injurious to us, and to be reconciled to them.

Let us then often contemplate this perfection of GOD, and repreſent it to our minds, that, by the frequent contemplation of it, we may " be tranſ- " formed into the image of the divine goodneſs." Is GOD ſo good to his creatures? with how much greater reaſon ſhould we be ſo to our fellow-creatures? Is GOD good to us? let us imitate his univerſal goodneſs, by endeavouring the good of mankind; and, as much as in us lies, of the whole creation of GOD. What GOD is to us, and what we would have him ſtill be to us, that let us be to others. We are infinitely beholden to this perfection of GOD for all that we are, and for all that we enjoy, and for all that we expect; and therefore we have all the reaſon in the world to admire and imitate it. Let this pat-

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tern of the divine goodneſs be continually before us, that we may be ſtill faſhioning our ſelves in the temper of our minds, and in the actions of our lives, to a likeneſs and conformity to it. SERM. CXLVI.

Laſtly, the conſideration of the divine goodneſs ſhould excite our praiſe and thankfulneſs: This is a great duty, to the performance whereof we ſhould ſummon all the powers and faculties of our ſouls; as the holy Pſalmiſt does, Pſal. ciii. 1, 2. "Bleſs the "LORD, O my ſoul; and all that is within me, "bleſs his holy name. Bleſs the LORD, O my ſoul, "and forget not all his benefits." And we ſhould invite all others to the ſame work, as the ſame devout Pſalmiſt frequently does; Pſal. cvi. 1. "O give thanks "unto the LORD, for he is good; for his mercy "endureth for ever." And Pſal. cvii. 8. "O that "men would praiſe the LORD for his goodneſs, "and for his wonderful works to the children of "men!"

And we had need to be often called upon to this duty, to which we have a peculiar backwardneſs. Neceſſity drives us to prayer, and ſends us to GOD for the ſupply of our wants; but praiſe and thankſgiving is a duty which depends upon our gratitude and ingenuity; and nothing ſooner wears off, than the ſenſe of kindneſs and benefits. We are very apt to forget the bleſſings of GOD, not ſo much from a bad memory, as from a bad nature; to forget the greateſt bleſſings, the continuance whereof ſhould continually put us in mind of them, the bleſſings of our beings. So GOD complains of his people, Deut. xxxii. 18. "Of the GOD that formed thee thou "haſt been unmindful;" the dignity and excellency of our being above all the creatures of this viſible world; Job xxxv. 10, 11. "None ſaith, Where is "GOD

SERM. CXLVI. "GOD my maker, who teacheth us more than the "beaſts of the earth, and maketh us wiſer than the "fowls of heaven?" the daily comforts and bleſſings of our lives, which we can continually receive, without almoſt ever looking up to the hand that gives them. So GOD complains by the prophet Hoſea, chap. ii. 8, 9. "She knew not that I gave her corn, and "wine, and oil, and multiplied her ſilver and gold." And is it not ſhameful to ſee how at the moſt plentiful tables, the giving of GOD thanks is almoſt grown out of faſhion? as if men were aſhamed to own from whence theſe bleſſings came. When thanks is all GOD expects from us, can we not afford to give him that? "Do ye thus requite the LORD, "fooliſh people, and unwiſe?" It is juſt with GOD to take away his bleſſings from us, if we deny him this eaſy tribute of praiſe and thankſgiving.

It is a ſign men are unfit for heaven, when they are backward to that which is the proper work and imployment of the bleſſed ſpirits above. Therefore, as ever we hope to come thither, let us begin this work here, and inure our ſelves to that which will be the great buſineſs of all eternity. Let us, with the four and twenty elders in the Revelation, "fall down "before him that ſits on the throne, and worſhip "him that liveth for ever and ever, and caſt our "crowns before the throne" (that is, caſt our ſelves) and aſcribe all glory to GOD, ſaying, "Thou art "worthy, O LORD, to receive glory, and honour, "and power; for thou haſt made all things, and "for thy pleaſure they are, and were created."

"To him therefore, the infinite and inexhauſti-"ble fountain of goodneſs, the father of mercies, and "the GOD of all conſolation, who gave us ſuch

"excel-

" excellent beings, having made us little lower than SERM.
" the angels, and crowned us with glory and ho- CXLVI.
" nour; who hath been pleaſed to ſtamp upon us
" the image of his own goodneſs, and thereby made
" us partakers of a divine nature, communicating
" to us not only of the effects of his goodneſs, but in
" ſome meaſure and degree of the perfection itſelf;
" to him who gives us all things richly to enjoy,
" which pertain to life and godlineſs, and hath made
" ſuch abundant proviſion, not only for our comfort
" and convenience in this preſent life, but for our
" unſpeakable happineſs to all eternity; to him who
" deſigned this happineſs to us from all eternity,
" and whoſe mercy and goodneſs to us endures for
" ever; who when by wilful tranſgreſſions and diſ-
" obedience we had plunged our ſelves into a ſtate
" of ſin and miſery, and had forfeited that happi-
" neſs which we were deſigned to, was pleaſed to
" reſtore us to a new capacity of it, by ſending his
" only ſon to take our nature, with the miſeries and
" infirmities of it, to live among us, and to die for
" us; in a word, to him who is infinitely good to
" us, not only contrary to our deſerts, but beyond
" our hopes, who renews his mercy upon us every
" morning, and is patient though we provoke him
" every day, who preſerves and provides for us, and
" ſpares us continually, who is always willing, al-
" ways watchful, and never weary to do us good;
" to him be all glory and honour, adoration and
" praiſe, love and obedience, now and for ever."

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SERMON CXLVII.

The mercy of God.

NUMB. xiv. 18.

The LORD *is long-ſuffering, and of great mercy.*

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I Have conſidered God's goodneſs in general. There are two eminent branches of it, his patience and mercy. The patience of God is his goodneſs to them that are guilty, in deferring or moderating their deſerved puniſhment: the mercy of God is his goodneſs to them that are, or may be miſerable. It is the laſt of theſe two I deſign to diſcourſe of at this time; in doing of which, I ſhall inquire,

Firſt, what we are to underſtand by the mercy of God.

Secondly, ſhew you, that this perfection belongs to God.

Thirdly, conſider the degree of it, that God is of great mercy.

Firſt, what we are to underſtand by the mercy of God.

I told you, it is his goodneſs to them that are in miſery, or liable to it; that is, that are in danger of it, or have deſerved it. It is mercy, to prevent the miſery that we are liable to, and which may befal us, though it be not actually upon us. It is mercy, to defer the miſery that we deſerve, or mitigate it; and this is, properly, patience and forbearance. It is mercy, to relieve thoſe that are in miſery, to ſupport or comfort them. It is mercy,

to

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o remit the miſery we deſerve, and, by pardon and forgiveneſs, to remove and take away the obligation to puniſhment.

Thus the mercy of GOD is uſually, in ſcripture, ſet forth to us by the affection of pity and compaſſion; which is an affection that cauſeth a ſenſible commotion and diſturbance in us, upon the apprehenſion of ſome great evil that lies upon another, or hangs over him. Hence it is that GOD is ſaid, in ſcripture, to be grieved and afflicted for the miſeries of men; his bowels are ſaid to ſound, and his heart to turn within him. But though GOD is pleaſed in this manner to ſet forth his mercy and tenderneſs towards us, yet we muſt take heed how we clothe the divine nature with the infirmities of human paſſions. We muſt not meaſure the perfection of GOD by the expreſſions of his condeſcenſion; and becauſe he ſtoops to our weakneſs, level him to our infirmities. When GOD is ſaid to pity us, we muſt take away the imperfection of this paſſion, the commotion and diſturbance of it, and not imagine any ſuch thing in GOD; but we are to conceive, that the mercy and compaſſion of GOD, without producing the diſquiet, do produce the effects of the moſt ſenſible pity.

Secondly, that this perfection belongs to GOD.

All the arguments that I uſed to prove the goodneſs of GOD, from the acknowledgment of natural light, and from ſcripture and reaſon, ſerve to prove that he is merciful; becauſe the mercy of GOD is an eminent branch of his goodneſs. I will only produce ſome of thoſe many texts of ſcripture which attribute this perfection to GOD. Exod. xxxiv. 6. "The LORD, the LORD GOD, merciful and gracious." Deut. iv. 31. "The LORD thy GOD is "a merciful GOD." 2 Chron. xxxiv. 9. "The LORD "your

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" your GOD is gracious and merciful." Neh. ix. 17. " Ready to pardon, gracious and merciful." Pſal. xxv. 10. " All the paths of the LORD are mercy." Pſal. lxii. 12. " Unto thee, O LORD, belongeth " mercy." Pſal. ciii. 8. " Merciful and gracious." Pſal. cxxx. 7. " With the LORD there is mercy." And ſo Jer. iii. 12. Joel ii. 13. Jonah iv. 2. Luke vi. 36. " Be ye therefore merciful, as your father " alſo is merciful." The ſcripture ſpeaks of this as moſt natural to him; 2 Cor. i. 3. he is called " the " Father of mercies." But when he puniſheth, he doth, as it were, relinquiſh his nature, and do a ſtrange work. " The LORD will wait that he may " be gracious," Iſa. xxx. 18. GOD paſſeth by opportunities of puniſhing, but his mercy takes opportunity to diſplay itſelf; " he waits to be gracious." To afflict or puniſh is a work that GOD is unwilling to do, that he takes no pleaſure in; Lam. iii. 33. " He doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the chil- " dren of men." But mercy is a work that he delights in, Mic. vii. 18. " He delighteth in mercy." When GOD ſhews mercy, he does it with pleaſure and delight; he is ſaid " to rejoice over his people " to do them good." Thoſe attributes that declare GOD's goodneſs, as when he is ſaid to be gracious, or merciful, and long-ſuffering, they ſhew what GOD is in himſelf, and delights to be: thoſe which declare his wrath and ſeverity, ſhew what he is upon provocation, and the occaſion of ſin; not what he chuſeth to be, but what we do, as it were, compel and neceſſitate him to be.

Thirdly, for the degree of it; that GOD is a GOD of great mercy.

The ſcripture doth delight to advance the mercy of GOD, and does uſe great variety of expreſſion to magnify

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magnify it. It ſpeaks of the greatneſs of his mercy; Numb. xiv. 19. "According unto the greatneſs "of thy mercy." 2 Sam. xxiv. 14. "Let me fall "into the hands of the LORD, for his mercies are "great." It is called an abundant mercy; 1 Pet. i. 3. "According to his abundant mercy." Pſal. ciii. 8. he is ſaid to be "plenteous in mercy;" and "rich in mercy." Eph. ii. 4. Pſal. v. 7. he ſpeaks of "the multitude of GOD's mercies;" and of the variety of them, Neh. ix. 19. "In thy manifold "mercies thou forſakeſt them not." So many are they, that we are ſaid to be ſurrounded and compaſſed about on every ſide with them; Pſal. ciii. 4. "Who crowneth thee with loving kindneſs, and "tender mercies."

And yet further to ſet forth the greatneſs of them, the ſcripture uſeth all dimenſions. Height; Pſal. lvii. 10. "Thy mercy is great unto the heavens." Nay, higher yet; Pſal. cviii. 4. "Thy mercy is great "above the heavens." For the latitude and extent of it, it is as large as the earth, and extends to all the creatures in it; Pſal. cxix. 64. "The earth, O "LORD, is full of thy mercy." Pſal. cxlv. 9. "His "tender mercies are over all his works." For the length, or duration and continuance of it; Exod. xxxiv. 7. "Laying up mercy in ſtore for thouſands "of generations," one after another. Nay, it is of a longer continuance; Pſal. cxviii. it is ſeveral times repeated, that "his mercy endureth for ever."

And to ſhew the intenſe degree of this affection of mercy or pity, the ſcripture uſeth ſeveral emphatical expreſſions to ſet it forth to us. The ſcripture ſpeaks of the tender mercies of GOD, Pſal. xxv. 6. "Remember, O LORD, thy tender mercies." Yea, of the multitude of theſe; Pſal. li. 1. "According

"unto

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" unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out " my tranſgreſſions." Jam. v. 11. " The LORD is " very pitiful, and of tender mercy." They are called GOD's bowels, which are the tendereſt parts, and apt to yern and ſtir in us when any affections of love and pity are excited; Iſ. lxiii. 15. " Where is " the ſounding of thy bowels, and of thy mercies " towards me? are they reſtrained?" Luke i. 78. " Through the tender mercy of our GOD;" ſo it is in our tranſlation: but if we render it from the original, it is " through the bowels of the mercies of " our GOD." How doth GOD condeſcend, in thoſe pathetical expreſſions which he uſeth concerning his people? Hoſ. xi. 8. " How ſhall I give thee up, " Ephraim? how ſhall I deliver thee, Iſrael? how " ſhall I make thee as Admah? how ſhall I ſet thee " as Zeboim? mine heart is turned within me, and " my repentings are kindled together." Nay, to expreſs his tender ſenſe of our miſeries and ſufferings, he is repreſented as being afflicted with us, and bearing a part in our ſufferings; Iſa. lxiii. 9. " In all " their afflictions he was afflicted."

The compaſſions of GOD are compared to the tendereſt affections among men: to that of a father towards his children; Pſal. ciii. 13. " Like as a fa- " ther pitieth his children, ſo the LORD pitieth them " that fear him." Nay, to the compaſſions of a mother towards her infant: Iſa. xlix. 50. " Can a woman " forget her ſucking child, that ſhe ſhould not have " compaſſion on the ſon of her womb?" Yea, ſhe may, it is poſſible, though moſt unlikely: but though a mother may turn unnatural, yet GOD cannot be unmerciful.

In ſhort, the ſcripture doth every where magnify the mercy of GOD, and ſpeak of it with all poſſible advan-

age; as if the divine nature, which doth in all ions excel all others, did in this excel itſelf. ripture ſpeaks of it as if GOD was wholly ip with it, as if it was his conſtant exerciſe and rment, ſo that, in compariſon of it, he doth diſplay any other excellency; Pſal. xxv. 10. the paths of the LORD are mercy;" as if, in rld, GOD had a deſign to advance his mercy his other attributes. The mercy of GOD is the throne; this is the day of mercy; and loth diſplay it, many times, with a ſeeming our to his other attributes, his juſtice, and s, and truth. His juſtice; this makes Job ain of the long life and proſperity of the wick- ob xxi. 7. "Wherefore do the wicked live, become old?" &c. His holineſs; this makes ophet expoſtulate with GOD, Hab. i. 13. ou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and ſt not look on iniquity: wherefore lookeſt thou n them that deal treacherouſly, and holdeſt tongue?" &c. And the truth of GOD; akes Jonah complain, as if GOD's mercies were s did make ſome reflection upon his truth, v. 2.

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that we may have more diſtinct apprehenſions greatneſs and number of GOD's mercies, I ſtribute them into kinds, and rank them under heads. It is mercy, to prevent thoſe evils iſeries that we are liable to: it is mercy, to de- oſe evils that we have deſerved, or to mitigate it is mercy, to ſupport and comfort us when is upon us: it is mercy, to deliver us from : but the greateſt mercy of all is, to remit the id miſery we have deſerved, by pardon and eneſs, to remove and take away the obligation

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to punishment. So that the mercy of God may be reduced to these five heads.

I. Preventing mercy. Many evils and miseries which we are liable to, God prevents them at a great distance; and when they are coming towards us, he stops them, or turns them another way. The merciful providence of God, and those invisible guards which protect us, do divert many evils from us, which fall upon others. We seldom take notice of God's preventing mercy; we are not apt to be sensible how great a mercy it is to be freed from those straits and necessities, those pains and diseases of body, those inward racks and horrors, which others are pressed withal, and labour under. When any evil or misery is upon us, would we not reckon it a mercy to be rescued and delivered from it? And is it not a greater mercy that we never felt it? Does not that man owe more to his physician, who prevents his sickness and distemper, than he who, after the weakness and languishing, the pains and tortures of several months, is at length cured by him?

II. Forbearing mercy. And this is the patience of God, which consists in the deferring or moderating of our deserved punishment. Hence it is, that "slow to anger, and of great mercy," do so often go together. But this I shall speak to hereafter in some particular discourses.

III. Comforting mercy. 2 Cor. i. 3. "The father "of mercies, and the God of all comfort." The scripture represents God as very merciful, in comforting and supporting those that are afflicted and cast down: hence are those expressions of "putting his "arms under us, bearing us up, speaking comfort-"ably, visiting us with his loving kindness:" which signify God's merciful regard to those who are in misery and distress.

IV. His

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IV. His relieving mercy, in ſupplying thoſe that are in want, and delivering thoſe that are in trouble. GOD doth, many times, exerciſe men with trouble and afflictions, with a very gracious and merciful deſign, to prevent greater evils, which men would otherwiſe bring upon themſelves. Afflictions are a merciful invention of heaven to do us that good, which nothing elſe can; they awaken us to a ſenſe of GOD, and of our ſelves, to a conſideration of the evil of our ways; they make us to take notice of GOD, to ſeek him, and to enquire after him. GOD doth, as it were, by afflictions, throw men upon their backs, to make them look up to heaven. Hoſ. v. 15. "In their affliction they will ſeek me early." Pſal. lxxviii. 34. "When he ſlew them, then they "ſought him, and they returned and inquired early "after GOD." But GOD does not delight in this; "he doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children "of men." When afflictions have accompliſhed their work, and obtained their end upon us, GOD is very ready to remove them, and command deliverance for us; Iſa. liv. 7, 8. "For a ſmall moment "have I forſaken thee, but with great mercies will "I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face "from thee for a moment, but with everlaſting "kindneſs will I have mercy on thee, ſaith the LORD "thy redeemer."

V. Pardoning mercy. And here the greatneſs and fulneſs of GOD's mercy appears, becauſe our ſins are great: Pſal. lxxviii. 38. "Being full of compaſſion, "he forgave their iniquity." And the multitude of GOD's mercies, becauſe our ſins are many; Pſal. li. 1. "Have mercy upon me, O GOD, according "unto thy loving-kindneſs; according to the mul-"titude of thy tender mercies blot out my tranſgreſ-

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" ſions." Exod. xxxiv. 7. he is ſaid " to pardon " iniquity, tranſgreſſion, and ſin." How manifold are his mercies, to forgive all our ſins, of what kind ſoever! The mercy of God to us in pardoning our ſins, is matter of aſtoniſhment and admiration; Mic. vii. 18. " Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth " iniquity!" But eſpecially if we conſider by what means our pardon is procured; by transferring our guilt upon the moſt innocent perſon, the ſon of God, and making him " to bear our iniquities," and to ſuffer the wrath of God which was due to us. The admirable contrivance of God's mercy appears in this diſpenſation; this ſhews the riches of his grace, that he ſhould be at ſo much coſt to purchaſe our pardon; " not with corruptible things, as ſilver and gold; " but with the precious blood of his own ſon;" Eph. i. 6, 7. " To the praiſe of the glory of his " grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the " beloved; in whom we have redemption through " his blood, the forgiveneſs of ſins, according to " the riches of his grace."

Having diſpatched the three particulars I propoſed to be ſpoken to, I ſhall ſhew what uſe we ought to make of this divine attribute.

Uſe 1. We ought with thankfulneſs to acknowledge and admire the great mercy of God to us. Let us view it in all its dimenſions; the height, and length, and breadth of it: in all the variety and kinds of it; the preventing mercy of God to many of us. Thoſe miſeries that lye upon others, it is mercy to us that we eſcape them. It is mercy that ſpares us. " It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not con- " ſumed, and becauſe his compaſſions fail not." It is mercy that mitigates our puniſhment, and makes it fall below the deſert of our ſins. It is mercy that comforts

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nforts and ſupports us under any of thoſe evils t lye upon us, and that reſcues and delivers us m them. Which way ſoever we look, we are ompaſſed with the mercies of GOD; they "compaſs us about on every ſide; we are crowned with loving-kindneſs, and tender mercies." It is mer- that feeds us, and clothes us, and that preſerves

But, above all, we ſhould thankfully acknowge and admire the pardoning mercy of GOD; l. ciii. 1, 2, 3. where David does, as it were, ſter up the mercies of GOD, and make a catague of them; he ſets the pardoning mercy in the nt; "Bleſs the LORD, O my ſoul, and all that is within me bleſs his holy name. Bleſs the LORD, O my ſoul, and forget not all his benefits; who forgiveth all thy iniquities."

If we look into our ſelves, and conſider our own per and diſpoſition, how void of pity and bowels are, how cruel, and hard-hearted, and inſolent, l revengeful; if we look abroad into the world, l ſee how "full the earth is of the habitations of cruelty; we ſhall admire the mercy of GOD re, and think our ſelves more beholden to it. ow many things muſt concur to make our hearts der and melt our ſpirits, and ſtir our bowels, to ke us pitiful and compaſſionate? We ſeldom pity , unleſs they be actually in miſery; nor all ſuch ther, unleſs the miſery they lie under be very at; nor then neither, unleſs the perſon that ſufs be nearly related, and we be ſome ways concern- in his ſufferings; yea, many times not then nei- r upon a generous account, but as we are ſome ys obliged by intereſt and ſelf-love, and a dear re- d to our ſelves, when we have ſuffered the like r ſelves, and have learned to pity others by our

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own ſufferings, or when in danger or probabili
be in the like condition our ſelves; ſo many mc
and obligations are neceſſary to awaken and ſt
this affection in us. But God is merciful and
ful to us out of the mere goodneſs of his na
for few of theſe motives and conſiderations can
any place in him. This affection of pity and te
neſs is ſtirred up in God by the mere preſence c
object, without any other inducement. The
cy of God, many times, doth not ſtay till we b
tually miſerable; but looks forward a great
and pities us at a great diſtance, and prevent
miſery. God doth not only pity us in great
mities; but conſiders thoſe leſſer evils that are
us. God is merciful to us, when we have def
all the evils that are upon us; and far greater
we are "leſs than the leaſt of all his mercies,"
we deſerved all the miſery that is upon us, and
with violent hands pulled it upon our own l
and have been the authors and procurers of it t
ſelves. Though God, in reſpect of his natur
at an infinite diſtance from us; yet his mercy is
to us, and he cannot poſſibly have any ſelf-in
in it. The divine nature is not liable to war
injury, or ſuffering; he is ſecure of his own
pineſs and fulneſs, and can neither wiſh the in
ment, nor fear the impairment of his eſtate; h
never ſtand in need of pity or relief from us, c
other, and yet he pities us.

Now if we conſider the vaſt difference of th
fection in God and us, how tender his mercie
and how ſenſible his bowels; and yet we who
ſo many arguments to move us to pity, how
our hearts are, and how unapt to relent, as
were born of the rock, and were the off-ſpri

the nether millſtone; ſure, when we duly conſider this, we cannot but admire the mercy of GOD. SERM. CXLVII.

How cruel are we to creatures below us! with how little remorſe can we kill a flea, or tread upon a worm? partly becauſe we are ſecure that they cannot hurt us, nor revenge themſelves upon us; and partly becauſe they are ſo deſpicable in our eyes, and ſo far below us, that they do not fall under the conſideration of our pity. Look upward, proud man! and take notice of him who is above thee: thou didſt not make the creatures below thee, as GOD did; there's but a finite diſtance between thee and the meaneſt creatures; but there's an infinite diſtance between thee and GOD. Man is a name of dignity, when we compare our ſelves with other creatures; but compared to GOD, "we are worms, and not "men;" yea, we are nothing, yea, "leſs than no-"thing, and vanity." How great then is the mercy of GOD, which regards us, who are ſo far below him, which takes into conſideration ſuch inconſiderable nothings as we are! We may ſay with David, Pſal. viii. 4. "LORD, what is man, that thou art "mindful of him, or the ſon of man, that thou "viſiteſt him?" and with Job, chap. vii. 17. "What "is man, that thou ſhouldeſt magnify him, and that "thou ſhouldeſt ſet thine heart upon him?"

And then how hard do we find it to forgive thoſe who have injured us? If any one have offended, or provoked us, how hard are we to be reconciled? How mindful of an injury? How do anger and revenge boil within us? How do we upbraid men with their faults? What vile and low ſubmiſſion do we require of them, before we will receive them into favour, and grant them peace? And if we forgive once, we think that is much; but if an offence and

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provocation be renewed often, we are inexorable. Even the diſciples of our SAVIOUR, after he had ſo emphatically taught them forgiveneſs, in the petition of the LORD's prayer, yet they had very narrow ſpirits as to this; Matth. xviii. 21. Peter comes to him, and aſks him, "How often ſhall my bro-"ther ſin againſt me, and I forgive him? till ſeven "times?" He thought that was much: And yet we have great obligations to pardoning and forgiving others, becauſe we are obnoxious to GOD and one another: we ſhall many times ſtand in need of pardon from GOD and men; and it may be our own caſe; and when it is, we are too apt to be very indulgent to our ſelves, and conceive good hopes of the mercy of others; we would have our ignorance, and inadvertencies, and miſtakes, and all occaſions, and temptations, and provocations conſidered; and when we have done amiſs, upon ſubmiſſion, and acknowledgment of our fault, we would be received into favour: but GOD, who is not at all liable to us, how ready is he to forgive! If we confeſs our ſins to him, he is merciful to forgive: he pardons freely; and ſuch are the condeſcenſions of his mercy, though he be the party offended, yet he offers pardon to us, and beſeeches us to be reconciled: if we do but come towards him, he runs to meet us, as in the parable of the prodigal, Luke xv. 20. What reaſon have we then thankfully to acknowledge and admire the mercy of GOD to us?

Uſe 2. The great mercy of GOD to us, ſhould ſtir up in us ſhame and ſorrow for ſin. The judgments of GOD may break us; but the conſideration of GOD's mercy ſhould rather melt and diſſolve us into tears: Luke vii. 47. the woman that waſhed CHRIST's feet with her tears, and wiped them with her

her hair, the account that our Saviour gives of the great affection that ſhe expreſſed to him, was, "ſhe "loved much, becauſe much was forgiven her;" and ſhe grieved much, becauſe much was forgiven her. SERM. CXLVII.

Eſpecially we ſhould ſorrow for thoſe ſins which have been committed by us after God's mercies received. Mercies after ſins ſhould touch our hearts, and make us relent: it ſhould grieve us that we ſhould offend and provoke a God ſo gracious and merciful, ſo ſlow to anger, and ſo ready to forgive: but ſin againſt mercies, and after we have received them, is attended with one of the greateſt aggravations of ſin. And as mercy raiſes the guilt of our ſins, ſo it ſhould raiſe our ſorrow for them. No conſideration is more apt to work upon human nature, than that of kindneſs; and the greater mercy has been ſhewed to us, the greater our ſins, and the greater cauſe of ſorrow for them; contraries do illuſtrate, and ſet off one another; in the great goodneſs and mercy of God to us, we ſee the great evil of our ſins againſt him.

Every ſin has the nature of rebellion and diſobedience; but ſins againſt mercy have ingratitude in them. Whenever we break the laws of God, we rebel againſt our ſovereign; but as we ſin againſt the mercies of God, we injure our benefactor. This makes our ſin to be horrid, and aſtoniſhing, Iſa. i. 2. "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for "the Lord hath ſpoken, I have nouriſhed and "brought up children, and they have rebelled againſt "me." All the mercies of God are aggravations of our ſins; 2 Sam. xii. 7, 8, 9. "And Nathan "ſaid to David, Thou art the man. Thus ſaith the "Lord God of Iſrael, I anointed thee king over Iſ-

"rael,

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" rael, and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul,
" and I gave thee thy master's house, and thy master's
" wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house of
" Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too lit-
" tle, I would moreover have given unto thee such
" and such things. Wherefore hast thou despised
" the commandment of the LORD, to do evil in his
" sight?" God reckons up all his mercies, and from them aggravates David's sin; 1 Kings xi. 9. he takes notice of all the unkind returns that we make to his mercy: and it is the worst temper in the world not to be wrought upon by kindness, not to be melted by mercy: no greater evidence of a wicked heart, than that the mercies of God have no effect upon it; Isai. xxvi. 13. " Let favour be shewed to the wick-
" ed, yet will he not learn righteousness."

Use 3. Let us imitate the merciful nature of God. This branch of God's goodness is very proper for our imitation. The general exhortation of our SAVIOUR, Matt. v. 48. " Be ye therefore perfect, e-
" ven as your Father which is in heaven is perfect;" is more particularly expressed by St. Luke chap. vi. 36. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also " is merciful." Men affect to make images, and impossible representations of God; but, as Seneca saith, *Crede deos, cum propitii essent, fictiles fuisse.* We may draw this image and likeness of God; we may be gracious and merciful as he is. CHRIST, who was " the express image of his Father," his whole life and undertaking was a continued work of mercy; " he went about doing good" to the souls of men, by preaching the gospel to them; and to the bodies of men, in healing all manner of diseases: there is nothing that he recommends more to us, in his gospel, than this spi-

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rit and temper; Mat. v. 7. "Bleſſed are the merciful, SERM. "for they ſhall obtain mercy." How many para- CXLVII. bles doth he uſe, to ſet forth the mercy of GOD to us, with a deſign to draw us to the imitation of it? The parable of the prodigal; of the good Samaritan; of the ſervant to whom he forgave ten thouſand talents. We ſhould imitate GOD in this, in being tender and compaſſionate to thoſe that are in miſery.

This is a piece of natural, indiſpenſable religion, to which poſitive and inſtituted religion muſt give way. Hoſ vi. 6. "I deſired mercy, and not ſacri- "fice;" which is twice cited and uſed by our SAVIOUR. Micah vi. 8. "He hath ſhewed thee, O "man, what it is that the LORD thy GOD requires "of thee; to do juſtice, and love mercy, and to "walk humbly with thy GOD."

This is always one part of the deſcription of a good man, that he is apt to pity the miſeries and neceſſities of others; Pſal. xxxvii. 26. "He is ever "merciful, and lendeth." He is far from cruelty, not only to men, but even to the brute creatures; Prov. xii. 10. "A righteous man regardeth the "life of his beaſt." There is nothing more contrary to the nature of GOD, than a cruel and ſavage diſpoſition, not to be affected with the miſeries and ſufferings of others: how unlike is this to "the Father of 'mercies, and the GOD of conſolation!" When we ſee cruelty exerciſed, and our bowels not to be ſtirred within us, nor our hearts be pricked; how unlike is this to GOD, who is "very pitiful, and of 'tender mercies!" But to rejoice at the miſeries of others, this is inhuman and barbarous. Hear how GOD threatens Edom for rejoicing at the miſeries of his brother Jacob; Obadiah ver. 10, 11, 12, 13, 14. But to delight to make others miſerable,

and

SERM. CXLVII. and to aggravate their ſufferings, this is deviliſh; this is the temper of hell, and the very ſpirit of the deſtroyer.

It becomes man, above all other creatures, to be merciful, who hath had ſuch ample and happy experience of GOD's mercy to him, and doth ſtill continually ſtand in need of mercy from GOD. GOD hath been very merciful to us. Had it not been for the tender mercies of GOD to us, we had all of us long ſince been miſerable. Now as we have received mercy from GOD, we ſhould ſhew it to others. The apoſtle uſeth this as an argument why we ſhould relieve thoſe that are in miſery and want, becauſe we have had ſuch experience of the mercy and love of GOD to us; 1 John iii. 16, 17. "Hereby perceive we the love of "GOD, becauſe he laid down his life for us. But "whoſo hath this world's good and ſeeth his bro-"ther have need, &c. how dwelleth the love of "GOD in him?" That man hath no ſenſe of the mercy of GOD abiding upon his heart, that is not merciful to his brother. And it is an argument why we ſhould forgive one another; Eph. iv. 32. "Be ye kind one "to another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, "even as GOD for CHRIST's ſake hath forgiven "you." Chap. v. 1. "Be ye therefore followers of "GOD, as dear children." Col. iii. 12, 13. "Put "on therefore (as the elect of GOD, holy and belov-"ed) bowels of mercies, kindneſs, humbleneſs of "mind, meekneſs, long-ſuffering; forbearing one "another, and forgiving one another, if any man "have a quarrel againſt any: even as CHRIST for-"gave you, ſo alſo do ye."

And we continually ſtand in need of mercy both from GOD and man. We are liable one to another, and in the change of human affairs, we may be all ſub-

ubject to one another by turns, and ſtand in need of one another's pity and compaſſion; and we muſt expect, that "with what meaſure we mete to others, "with the ſame it ſhall be meaſured to us again." To reſtrain the cruelties, and check the inſolencies of men, GOD hath ſo ordered, in his providence, that very often, in this world, mens cruelties return upon their own heads, and their violent dealings upon their own pates. Bajazet meets with a Tamerlane. SERM. CXLVII.

But if men were not thus liable to one another, we all ſtand in need of mercy from GOD. If we be merciful to others in ſuffering, and forgiving them that have injured us, GOD will be ſo to us, he will pardon our ſins to us: Prov. xvi. 6. "By mercy and "truth iniquity is purged." 2 Sam. xxii. 26. "With the merciful thou wilt ſhew thy ſelf merci-"ful." Prov. xiv. 21. "He that hath mercy on the "poor, happy is he." Prov. xxi. 21. "He that fol-"loweth after righteouſneſs and mercy, findeth life." Matth. vi. 14. "If ye forgive men their treſpaſſes, "your heavenly Father will alſo forgive you." But on the other hand, If we be malicious and revengeful, and implacable to thoſe that have offended us, and inexorable to thoſe who deſire to be received to favour, and cruel to thoſe who lye at our mercy, hard-hearted to them that are in neceſſity; what can we expect, but that the mercy of GOD will leave us, that he will "forget to be gracious, and ſhut up in "anger his tender mercy." Matt. vi. 15. "If ye "forgive not men their treſpaſſes, neither will "your Father forgive your treſpaſſes." That is a dreadful paſſage, St James ii. 13. "He ſhall "have judgment without mercy, that hath ſhewed "no mercy." How angry is the LORD with the ſervant who was ſo inexorable to his fellow ſervant,

after

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after he had forgiven him ſo great a debt, as you find in the parable, Mat. xviii. 24. He owed him ten thouſand talents, and, upon his ſubmiſſion and intreaty to have patience with him, he was moved with compaſſion, and looſed him, and forgave him all: but no ſooner had this favour been done to him by his LORD, but, going forth, he meets his fellow-ſervant, who owed him a ſmall, inconſiderable debt, an hundered pence; he lays hands on him, and takes him by the throat, and roundly demands payment of him: he falls down at his feet, and uſeth the ſame form of ſupplication that he had uſed to his LORD; but he rejects his requeſt, and puts him in priſon. Now what ſaith the LORD to him? ver. 32, 33, 34. "O thou wicked ſervant, I forgave thee all that "debt, becauſe thou deſiredſt me. Shouldeſt not "thou alſo have had compaſſion on thy fellow-ſervant, even as I had pity on thee? And his LORD "was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, "till he ſhould pay all that was due unto him." Now what application doth our SAVIOUR make of this? ver. 35. "So likewiſe ſhall my heavenly Father do alſo unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their treſpaſſes."

GOD's readineſs to forgive us ſhould be a powerful motive and argument to us to forgive others. The greateſt injuries that we can ſuffer from men, if we compare them to the ſins that we commit againſt GOD, they bear no proportion to them, neither in weight nor number; they are but as an hundred pence to ten thouſand talents. If we would be like GOD, we ſhould forgive the greateſt injuries; he pardoneth our ſins, though they be exceeding great; many injuries; though offences be renewed, and provocations multiplied: for ſo GOD doth to us;

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"He pardoneth iniquity, tranſgreſſion and ſin," Ex. xxxiv. 7. Iſa. lv. 7. "He will have mercy, he "will abundantly pardon." We would not have God only to forgive us ſeven times, but ſeventy times ſeven, as often as we offend him; ſo ſhould we forgive our brother.

And we ſhould not be backward to this work; God is "ready to forgive us," Neh. ix. 17. And we ſhould do it heartily, not only in word, when we retain malice in our hearts, and while we ſay we forgive, carry on a ſecret deſign in our hearts of revenging our ſelves when we have opportunity: but we ſhould from our hearts forgive every one; for ſo God doth to us, who when he forgives us, "caſts "our iniquities behind his back, and throws them "into the bottom of the ſea, and blots out our tranſ- "greſſion, ſo as to remember our iniquity no more."

If we do not thus, every time we put up the petition to God, "forgive us our treſpaſſes, as we "forgive them that treſpaſs againſt us," we do not pray for mercy, but for judgment; we invoke his wrath, and do not put up a prayer, but a dreadful imprecation againſt our ſelves; we pronounce the ſentence of our own condemnation, and importune God not to forgive us.

Uſe 4. If the mercy of God be ſo great, this may comfort us againſt deſpair. Sinners are apt to be dejected, when they conſider their unworthineſs, the nature and number of their ſins, and the many heavy aggravations of them; they are apt to ſay, with Cain, that "their ſin is greater than can be for- "given." But do not look only upon thy ſins, but upon the mercies of God. Thou canſt not be too ſenſible of the evil of ſin, and of the deſert of it; but whilſt we aggravate our ſins, we muſt not leſſen the

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the mercies of GOD. When we conſider the multitude of our ſins, we muſt conſider alſo the multitude of GOD's tender mercies: we have been great ſinners, and GOD is of great mercy; we have multiplied our provocations, and he multiplies to pardon.

Do but thou put thy ſelf in a capacity of mercy, by repenting of thy ſins, and forſaking of them, and thou haſt no reaſon to doubt but the mercy of GOD will receive thee; "If we confeſs our ſins, he is "merciful and faithful to forgive them." If we had offended man, as we have done GOD, we might deſpair of pardon; but it is GOD, and not man, that we have to deal with: and "his ways are not "as our ways, nor his thoughts as our thoughts: "but as the heavens are high above the earth, ſo "are his ways above our ways, and his thoughts "above our thoughts."

We cannot be more injurious to GOD, than by hard thoughts of him, as if fury were in him, and, when we have provoked him, he were not to be appeaſed and reconciled to us. We diſparage the goodneſs and truth of GOD, when we diſtruſt thoſe gracious declarations which he has made of his mercy and goodneſs; if we do not think that he doth heartily pity and compaſſionate ſinners, and really deſire their happineſs. Doth not he condeſcend ſo low as to repreſent himſelf afflicted for the miſeries of men, and to rejoice in the converſion of a ſinner? and ſhall not we believe that he is in good earneſt? Doth CHRIST weep over impenitent ſinners, becauſe "they will not know the things of their peace?" and canſt thou think he will not pardon thee, upon thy repentance? Is he grieved that men will undo themſelves, and will not be ſaved? and canſt thou think that he is unwilling to forgive? We cannot honour

nour and glorify GOD more, than by entertaining great thoughts of his mercy. As we are ſaid to glorify GOD by our repentance, becauſe thereby we acknowledge GOD's holineſs and juſtice; ſo we glorify him by believing his mercy, becauſe we conceive a right opinion of his goodneſs and truth; we ſet to our ſeal, that GOD is merciful and true; Pſal. cxlvii. 11. it is ſaid, that "GOD takes pleaſure in them "that hope in his mercy." As he delights in mercy, ſo in our acknowledgments of it; that ſinners ſhould conceive great hopes of it, and believe him to be what he is. Provided thou doſt ſubmit to the terms of GOD's mercy, thou haſt no reaſon to deſpair of it; and he that thinks that his ſins are more, or greater than the mercy of GOD can pardon, muſt think that there may be more evil in the creature than there is goodneſs in GOD. SERM. CXLVII.

Uſe 5. By way of caution againſt the preſumptuous ſinner. If there be any that treſpaſs upon the goodneſs of GOD, and preſume to encourage themſelves in ſin, upon the hopes of his mercy; let ſuch know, that GOD is juſt, as well as merciful. A god of all mercy is an idol, ſuch a god as men ſet up in their own imaginations; but not the true GOD, whom the ſcriptures deſcribe. To ſuch perſons the ſcripture deſcribes him after another manner; Nah. i. 2. "GOD is jealous; the LORD revengeth, and is "furious; the LORD will take vengeance on his ad- "verſaries, and reſerveth wrath for his enemies." If any man abuſe the mercy of GOD, to "the ſtrengthening of himſelf in his own wickedneſs, and bleſs "himſelf in his heart, ſaying, I ſhall have peace, "though I walk in the imagination of mine heart, "and add drunkenneſs to thirſt: the LORD will "not ſpare him, but then the anger of the LORD

SERM. CXLVII. " and his jealouſy ſhall ſmoke againſt that man, and " all the curſes that are written in this book ſhall " lie upon him, and the LORD will blot out his " name from under heaven," Deut. xxix. 19, 20.

Though it be the nature of GOD to be merciful, yet the exerciſe of his mercy is regulated by his wiſdom; he will not be merciful to thoſe that deſpiſe his mercy, to thoſe that abuſe it, to thoſe that are reſolved to go on in their ſins to tempt his mercy, and make bold to ſay, " Let us ſin, that grace may " abound." GOD deſigns his mercy for thoſe that are prepared to receive it; Iſa. lv. 7. " Let the wick- " ed forſake his ways, and the unrighteous man his " thoughts, and turn unto the LORD, and he will " have mercy, and to our GOD, for he will abun- " dantly pardon." The mercy of GOD is an enemy to ſin, as well as his juſtice; and it is no where offered to countenance ſin, but to convert the ſinner; and is not intended to encourage our impenitency, but our repentance. GOD hath no where ſaid that he will be merciful to thoſe who, upon the ſcore of his mercy, are bold with him, and preſume to offend him; but " the mercy of the LORD is upon them " that fear him, and keep his covenant, and re- " member his commandments to do them. There " is forgiveneſs with him, that he may be feared;" but not that he may be deſpiſed and affronted. This is to contradict the very end of GOD's mercy, which is, to lead us to repentance, to engage us to leave our ſins, not to encourage us to continue in them.

Take heed then of abuſing the mercy of GOD: we cannot provoke the juſtice of GOD more, than by preſuming upon his mercy. This is the time of GOD's mercy; uſe this opportunity: if thou neglecteſt it, a day of juſtice and vengeance is coming;

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Rom. ii. 4, 5. "Deſpiſeſt thou the riches of his "goodneſs, and forbearance, and long-ſuffering, "not knowing that the goodneſs of GOD leads to "repentance? And treaſureſt up unto thy ſelf wrath "againſt the day of wrath, and the revelation of "the righteous judgment of GOD?" Now is the manifeſtation of GOD's mercy; but there is a time a coming, when the righteous judgment of GOD will be revealed againſt thoſe who abuſe his mercy, "not "knowing that the goodneſs of GOD leadeth to re-"pentance." To think that the goodneſs of GOD was intended for any other end than to take us off from ſin, is a groſs and affected ignorance that will ruin us; and they who draw any concluſion from the mercy of GOD, which may harden them in their ſins, they are ſuch as the prophet ſpeaks of, Iſ. xxvii. 11. "A people of no underſtanding; therefore he that "made them will not have mercy on them; and he "that formed them will ſhew them no favour." Mercy itſelf will rejoice in the ruin of thoſe that abuſe it, and it will aggravate their condemnation. There is no perſon towards whom GOD will be more ſeverely juſt, than towards ſuch. The juſtice of GOD, exaſperated and ſet on by his injured and abuſed mercy, like a razor ſet in oil, will have the keener edge, and be the ſharper for it's ſmoothneſs. Thoſe that have made the mercy of GOD their enemy, muſt expect the worſt his juſtice can do unto them.

SERMON CXLVIII.

The patience of God.

2 PET. iii. 9.

The LORD *is not ſlack concerning his promiſe, (as ſome men count ſlackneſs) but is long-ſuffering to us-ward, not willing that any ſhould periſh, but that all ſhould come to repentance.*

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IN the beginning of this chapter the apoſtle puts the Chriſtians, to whom he writes, in mind of the predictions of the ancient prophets, and of the apoſtles of our LORD and SAVIOUR, concerning the general judgment of the world, which by many (and, perhaps, by the apoſtles themſelves) had been thought to be very near, and that it would preſently follow the deſtruction of Jeruſalem; but he tells them, that before that, there would ariſe a certain ſect, or ſort of men, that would deride the expectation of a future judgment, deſigning, probably, the Carpocratians (a branch of that large ſect of the Gnoſticks) of whom St. Auſtin expreſly ſays, that they denied the reſurrection, and conſequently, a future judgment. Theſe St. Peter calls ſcoffers, ver. 3. 4. "Knowing "this firſt, that there ſhall come in the laſt days "ſcoffers, walking after their own luſts, and ſaying, "where is the promiſe of his coming?" The word is ἐπαγγελία, which ſignifies a declaration in general, whether it be by way of promiſe or threatening. What is become of that declaration of CHRIST ſo frequently repeated in the goſpel, concerning his com-

ng to judgment? "For ſince the fathers fell aſleep," or, "ſaving that the fathers are fallen aſleep," except only that men die, and one generation ſucceeds another, "all things continue as they were from the "creation of the world;" that is, the world continues ſtill as it was from the beginning, and there is no ſign of any ſuch change and alteration as is foretold. To this he anſwers two things:

1. That theſe ſcoffers, though they took themſelves to be wits, did betray great ignorance, both of the condition of the world, and of the nature of GOD. They talked very ignorantly concerning the world, when they ſaid, "All things continued as they were "from the creation of it," when ſo remarkable a change had already happened, as the deſtruction of it by water; and therefore the prediction concerning the deſtruction of it by fire, before the great and terrible day of judgment, was no ways incredible. And they ſhewed themſelves likewiſe very ignorant of the perfection of the divine nature; to which, being eternally the ſame, a thouſand years and one day are all one: and if GOD make good his word ſome thouſands of years hence, it will make no ſenſible difference concerning his eternal duration; it being no matter when a duration begins, which is never to have an end; ver. 8. "Be not ignorant of "this one thing, that one day is with the LORD "as a thouſand years, and a thouſand years as one "day." This, it ſeems, was a common ſaying among the Jews, to ſignify, that to the eternity of GOD, no finite duration bears any proportion; and therefore, with regard to eternity, it is all one whether it be a thouſand years, or one day. The Pſalmiſt hath an expreſſion much to the ſame purpoſe, Pſal. xc. 4. "For a thouſand years in thy ſight are

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" but as yeſterday, when it is paſt, and as a watch " in the night." And the ſon of Sirach likewiſe, Ecclus. xviii. 10. " As a drop of water to the ſea, " and as a grain of ſand to the ſea-ſhore, ſo are a " thouſand years to the days of eternity." The like expreſſion we meet with in heathen writers; " to the " gods no time is long," ſaith Pythagoras: And Plutarch, " the whole ſpace of a man's life, to the " gods, is as nothing." And in his excellent diſcourſe of the ſlowneſs of the divine vengeance, (the very argument St. Peter is here upon) he hath this paſſage, " that a thouſand, or ten thouſand years, are but as " an indiviſible point to an infinite duration." And therefore, when the judgment is to be eternal, the delay of it, though it were for a thouſand years, is an objection of no force, againſt either the certainty, or the terror of it; for, to eternity, all time is equally ſhort; and it matters not when the puniſhment of ſinners begins, if it ſhall never have an end.

2. But becauſe the diſtance between the declaration of a future judgment, and the coming of it, though it be nothing to God, yet it ſeemed long to them: therefore he gives ſuch an account of it, as doth not in the leaſt impeach the truth and faithfulneſs of God, but is a clear argument and demonſtration of his goodneſs. Admitting what they ſaid to be true, that God delays judgment for a great while, yet this gives no ground to conclude that judgment will never be; but it ſhews the great goodneſs of God to ſinners, that he gives them ſo long a ſpace of repentance, that ſo they may prevent the terror of that day, whenever it comes, and eſcape that dreadful ruin, which will certainly overtake, ſooner or later, all impenitent ſinners: " The Lord is not ſlack " concerning his promiſe;" that is, as to the de-

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claration which he hath made of a future judgment, "as ſome men account ſlackneſs;" that is, as if the delay of judgment were an argument it would never come. This is a falſe inference from the delay of puniſhment, and an ill interpretation of the goodneſs of GOD to ſinners, who bears long with them, and delays judgment, on purpoſe to give men time to repent, and, by repentance, to prevent their own eternal ruin; "GOD is not ſlack concerning his promiſe, as ſome men count ſlackneſs; but "is long-ſuffering to us-ward, not willing that any "ſhould periſh, but that all ſhould come to repentance." In the handling of theſe words, I ſhall do theſe three things:

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Firſt, I ſhall conſider the patience and long-ſuffering of GOD, as it is an attribute and perfection of the divine nature; "GOD is long-ſuffering to "us-ward."

Secondly, I ſhall ſhew, that the patience of GOD, and the delay of judgment, is no juſt ground why ſinners ſhould hope for impunity, as the ſcoffers, here foretold by the apoſtle, argued, that becauſe our LORD delayeth his coming to judgment ſo long, therefore he would never come; "GOD is not ſlack con-"cerning his promiſe, as ſome men count ſlackneſs."

Thirdly, I will conſider the true reaſon of GOD's patience and long-ſuffering towards mankind, which the apoſtle here gives; "he is long-ſuffering to us-"ward, not willing that any ſhould periſh, but that "all ſhould come to repentance."

Firſt, I will conſider the patience and long-ſuffering of GOD towards mankind, as it is an attribute and perfection of the divine nature; "GOD is long-"ſuffering to us-ward." In the handling of this, I ſhall do theſe three things.

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I. I ſhall ſhew what is meant by the patience and long-ſuffering of God.

II. That this is a perfection of the divine nature.

III. I ſhall give ſome proof and demonſtration of the great patience and long-ſuffering of God to mankind.

I. What is meant by the patience and long-ſuffering of God.

The Hebrew word ſignifies one that keeps his anger long, or that is long before he is angry. In the new teſtament it is ſometimes expreſſed by the word ὑπομονὴ, which ſignifies God's forbearance, and patient waiting for our repentance; ſometimes by the word ἀνοχὴ, which ſignifies God's holding in his wrath, and reſtraining himſelf from puniſhing; and ſometimes by μακροθυμία, which ſignifies the extent of his patience, his long-ſuffering, and forbearing for a long time the puniſhment due to ſinners.

So that the patience of God is his goodneſs to ſinners, in deferring or moderating the puniſhment due to them for their ſins; the deferring of deſerved puniſhment in whole, or in part, which, if it be extended to a long time, it is properly his long ſuffering; and the moderating, as well as the deferring of the puniſhment due to ſin, is an inſtance likewiſe of God's patience; and not only the deferring and moderating of temporal puniſhment, but the adjourning of the eternal miſery of ſinners, is a principal inſtance of God's patience; ſo that the patience of God takes in all that ſpace of repentance which God affords to ſinners in this life; nay, all temporal judgments and afflictions which befal ſinners in this life, and are ſhort of cutting them off, and turning them into hell, are comprehended in the patience of God. Whenever God puniſheth, "it is of his great mer-

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" cy and patience that we are not conſumed, and SERM.
" becauſe his compaſſions fail not." I proceed to the CXLVIII.

IId Thing I propoſed, which was to ſhew, that patience is a perfection of the divine nature.

It is not neceſſarily due to us, but it is due to the perfection of the divine nature, and eſſentially belongs to it. It is a principal branch of God's goodneſs which is the higheſt and moſt glorious perfection of all other; and therefore we always find it in ſcripture, in the company of God's milder and ſweeter attributes. When God would give the moſt perfect deſcription of himſelf, and as he ſays, to Moſes, " make all his glory to paſs before us," he uſually does it by thoſe attributes which declare his goodneſs; and patience is always one of them, Exod. xxxiv. 6. " The Lord paſſed by before Moſes, and " proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord God, merci- " ful and gracious, long-ſuffering and abundant in " goodneſs and truth." Pſal. lxxxvi. 15. " But " thou, O Lord, art a God full of compaſſion, and " gracious, long-ſuffering and plenteous in mercy " and truth." Pſal. ciii. 8. " The Lord is merciful " and gracious, ſlow to anger, and plenteous in mer- " cy!" And the ſame you find Pſal. cxlv. 8. Jonah iv. 2. Joel iii. 13.

Sometimes, indeed, you find a ſeverer attribute added to theſe, as that " he will by no means clear " the guilty," Ex. xxxiv. 7. But it is always put in the laſt place; to declare to us, that God's goodneſs, and mercy, and patience are his firſt and primary perfections: and it is only when theſe fail, and have no effect upon us, but are abuſed by us, to the encouragement of our ſelves in an impenitent courſe, that his juſtice takes place.

Nay, even among men, it is eſteemed a perfecti-

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on to be able to forbear and to reſtrain our anger; paſſion is impotency and folly, but patience is power and wiſdom. Prov. xiv. 29. "He that is ſlow to "wrath, is of great underſtanding; but he that is "haſty of ſpirit, exalteth folly." Prov. xvi. 32. "He that is ſlow to anger, is better than the migh- "ty: and he that ruleth his ſpirit, than he that "taketh a city." Rom. xii. 21. "Be not over- "come of evil, but overcome evil with good." To be impatient is to be overcome, but to forbear anger and revenge is victory. Patience is an argument of great power and command of our ſelves; and therefore God himſelf, who is the moſt powerful being, is ſlow to anger, and of infinite patience; and nothing doth more declare the power of God, than his patience; that when he is provoked by ſuch vile and deſpicable creatures as we are, he can withhold his hand from deſtroying us. This is the argument which Moſes uſeth, Numb. xiv. 17, 18. that the power of God doth ſo eminently appear in his patience; "And now, I beſeech thee, let the "power of my Lord be great, according as thou "haſt ſpoken, ſaying, the Lord is gracious, and "long-ſuffering." And yet power, where it is not reſtrained by wiſdom and goodneſs, is a great temptation to anger; becauſe where there is power, there is ſomething to back it, and make it good. And therefore the pſalmiſt doth recommend and ſet off the patience of God, from the conſideration of his power; Pſal. vii. 11. "God is ſtrong, and patient; "God is provoked every day;" God is ſtrong, and therefore patient; or, he is infinitely patient, notwithſtanding his almighty power to revenge the daily provocations of his creatures.

Among men, anger and weakneſs commonly go toge-

together; but they are ill matched, as is excellently observed by the ſon of Sirach, Ecclus. x, 18. "Pride "was not made for man, nor furious anger for "him that is born of a woman." So that anger and impatience is every where unreaſonable: where there is power, impatience is below it, and a thing too mean for omnipotency; and where there wants power, anger is above it: it is too much for a weak and impotent creature to be angry. Where there is power, anger is needleſs, and of no uſe; and where there is no power, it is vain, and to no purpoſe. So that patience is every where a perfection, both in God and man. I proceed to the

IIId Thing I propoſed, which was to give ſome proof and demonſtration of the great patience and long-ſuffering of God to mankind. And this will evidently appear, if we conſider theſe two things:

1. How men deal with God.

2. How, notwithſtanding this, God deals with them.

1. How men deal with God. Every day we highly offend and provoke him, we grieve and weary him with our iniquities, as the expreſſion is in the prophet, Iſa. xliii. 24. "thou haſt made me to ſerve with thy "ſins; thou haſt wearied me with thine iniquities." Every ſin that we commit is an affront to the divine majeſty, and a contempt of his authority: by denying ſubmiſſion to his laws we queſtion his omnipreſence, and ſay, "Doth God ſee? and is there know-"ledge in the moſt High?" Or if we acknowledge his omnipreſence, and that he regards what we do, the provocation is ſtill the greater; becauſe then we affront him to his face; we dare his juſtice, and challenge his omnipotency, and provoke the Lord to jealouſy, as if we were ſtronger than he.

Is not God patient, when "the whole world lies

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" in wickedneſs," and " the earth is overſpread " with violence," and " is full of the habitations of " cruelty?" when he who is " of purer eyes than " to behold iniquity," and is ſo highly offended at the ſins of men, hath yet the patience to look upon " them that deal treacherouſly, and to hold his " peace?" when the " wicked perſecutes and de- " vours the man that is more righteous than he?" when even that part of the world, which profeſſeth the name of God and Christ, do, by their vile and abominable lives, " blaſpheme that holy and glorious " name whereby they are called?"

Every moment God hath greater injuries done to him, and more affronts put upon him, than were ever offered to all the ſons of men: and, ſurely, provocations are trials of patience, eſpecially when they are ſo numerous, and ſo heinous; for if offences riſe according to the dignity of the perſon injured, and the meanneſs of him that doth the injury, then no offences are ſo great as thoſe that are committed by men againſt God, no affronts like to thoſe which are offered to the divine majeſty by the continual provocations of his creatures. And is not this an argument of God's patience, that the glorious majeſty of heaven ſhould bear ſuch multiplied indignities from ſuch vile worms? that he who is the former of all things, ſhould endure his own creatures to rebel againſt him, and the work of his hands to ſtrike at him? that he who is our great benefactor ſhould put up ſuch affronts from thoſe who depend upon his bounty, and are maintained at his charge? that he, in whoſe hands our breath is, ſhould ſuffer men to breathe out oaths, and curſes, and blaſphemies againſt him? Surely theſe prove the patience of God to purpoſe, and are equally trials and arguments of it.

2. The

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2. The patience of GOD will farther appear, if we conſider how, notwithſtanding all this, GOD deals with us. He is patient to the whole world, in that he doth not turn us out of being, and "turn the "wicked together into hell, with all the nations that "forget GOD." He is patient to the greateſt part of mankind, in that he makes but a few terrible examples of his juſtice, "that others may hear and "fear, and take warning by them." He is patient to particular perſons, in that, notwithſtanding our daily provocations, he prevents us daily with the bleſſing of his goodneſs, prolonging our lives, and vouchſafing ſo many favours to us, that, by this great goodneſs, we may be led to repentance.

But the patience of GOD will more illuſtriouſly appear, if we conſider theſe following particulars, which are ſo many evidences and inſtances of it.

1. That GOD is not obliged to ſpare and forbear us at all. It is patience, that he doth not ſurprize us in the very act of ſin, and let fly at us with a thunder-bolt ſo ſoon as ever we have offended; that the wrath of GOD doth not fall upon the intemperate perſon, as it did upon the Iſraelites, "whilſt "the meat and drink is yet in their mouths;" that a man is not ſtruck dead or mad whilſt he is telling a lie; that the ſoul of the profane and falſe ſwearer does not expire with his oaths and perjuries.

2. That GOD ſpares us, when it is in his power ſo eaſily to ruin us; when he can with one word command us out of being, and, by cutting aſunder one little thread, let us drop into hell. If GOD were diſpoſed to ſeverity, he could deal with us after another manner; and as the expreſſion is in the prophet, "eaſe himſelf of his adverſaries, and be avenged of "his enemies."

3. That

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3. That God exerciſeth this patience to ſinners, *flagrante bello*, while they are up in arms againſt him, and committing hoſtilities upon him; he bears with us, even when we are challenging his juſtice to puniſh us, and provoking his power to deſtroy us.

4. That he is ſo very ſlow and unwilling to puniſh, and to inflict his judgments upon us. As for eternal puniſhments, God defers them a long while, and by all proper ways and means endeavours to prevent them, and to bring us to repentance. And as for thoſe temporal judgments which God inflicts upon ſinners, he carries himſelf ſo, that we may plainly ſee all the ſigns of unwillingneſs that can be; he tries to prevent them; he is loth to ſet about this work; and when he does, it is with much reluctance; and then he is eaſily perſuaded and prevailed withal not to do it; and when he does, he does it not rigorouſly, and to extremity; and he is ſoon taken off, after he is engaged in it. All which are great inſtances and evidences of his wonderful patience to ſinners.

(1.) God's unwillingneſs to puniſh appears, in that he labours to prevent puniſhment; and that he may effectually do this, he endeavours to prevent ſin, the meritorious cauſe of God's judgments. To this end, he hath threatened it with ſevere puniſhments, that the dread of them may make us afraid to offend; and if this will not do, he does not yet give us over, but gives us a ſpace of repentance, and invites us earneſtly to turn to him, and thereby to prevent his judgments; he expoſtulates with ſinners, and reaſons the caſe with them, as if he were more concerned not to puniſh, than they are not to be puniſhed: and thus, by his earneſt deſire of our repentance, he ſhews how little he deſires our ruin.

(2.) He is long before he goes about this work.

Judgment is in ſcripture, called "his ſtrange work;" as if he were not acquainted with it, and hardly knew how to go about it on the ſudden. He is repreſented as not prepared for ſuch a work, Deut. xxxii. 41. "If I whet my glittering ſword:" as if the inſtruments of puniſhment were not ready for us. Nay by a ſtrange kind of condeſcenſion to our capacities, and to ſet forth to us the patience of God, and his ſlowneſs to wrath, after the manner of men, he is repreſented as keeping out of the way, that he may not be tempted to deſtroy us; Exod. xxxiii. 2, 3. where he tells Moſes, that "he would ſend an "angel before them; for I will not go up in the "midſt of thee, leſt I conſume thee in the way." SERM. CXLVIII.

At works of mercy he is very ready and forward. When Daniel prayed for the deliverance of the people of Iſrael out of captivity, the angel tells him, that, "at the beginning of his ſupplication, the com-"mandment came forth," to bring him a promiſe of their deliverance. The mercy of God, many times, prevents our prayers, and outruns our wiſhes and deſires: but when he comes to affliction, he takes time to do it; he paſſeth by many provocations, and waits long in expectation, that, by our repentance, we will prevent his judgments; "he hark-"ened and heard, (ſaith God in the prophet Jeremiah) "but they ſpake not right: no man repented "him of his wickedneſs, ſaying, what have I done?" He is repreſented as waiting and liſtening, to hear if any penitent word would drop from them; he gives the ſinner time to repent and reflect upon his actions, and to conſider what he hath done, and ſpace to reaſon himſelf into repentance. For this reaſon the judgments of God do often follow the ſins of men at a great diſtance, otherwiſe he could eaſily make

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make them mend their pace, and "conſume us in a "moment."

(3.) When he goes about this work, he does it with much reluctance: Hoſea xi. 8. "How ſhall "I give thee up, Ephraim? how ſhall I deliver "thee, Iſrael? mine heart is turned within me, and "my repentings are kindled together." He is repreſented as making many eſſays and offers before he came to it: Pſal. cvi. 26. "Many a time lifted "he up his hand in the wilderneſs to deſtroy them." He made as if he would do it, and let fall his hand again, as if he could not find in his heart to be ſo ſevere. GOD withholds his judgments till he is weary of holding in, as the expreſſion is Jer. vi. 11. till he can forbear no longer; Jer. xliv. 22. "So that "the LORD could no longer bear, becauſe of the "evil of your doings, and becauſe of the abomina-"tions which ye have committed."

(4.) GOD is eaſily prevailed upon not to puniſh. When he ſeemed reſolved upon it, to deſtroy the murmuring Iſraelities, yet how often, at the interceſſion of Moſes, did he turn away his wrath? That he will accept of very low terms to ſpare a very wicked people, appears by the inſtance of Sodom, where, if there had beeen but ten righteous perſons, he would not have deſtroyed them for the ten's ſake. Yea, when his truth ſeemed to have been pawned, (at leaſt in the apprehenſion of his prophet) yet even then repentance took him off, as in the caſe of Nineveh. Nay, how glad is he to be thus prevented! with what joy does he tell the prophet the news of Ahab's humiliation! "Seeſt thou how Ahab hum-"bleth himſelf? Becauſe he humbleth himſelf, I will "not bring the evil in his days."

(5.) When he puniſheth, he does it very ſeldom rigor-

rigorouſly, and to extremity, not ſo much as we deſerve; Pſal. ciii. 10. "He hath not dealt with "us after our ſins, nor rewarded us according to "our iniquities." Nor ſo much as he can, he doth not let looſe the fierceneſs of his anger, nor pour forth all his wrath. Pſal. lxxviii. 38. "he being full "of compaſſion, forgave their iniquity, and de- "ſtroyed them not; yea, many a time turned he "his anger away, and did not ſtir up all his wrath." SERM. CXLVIII.

(6.) After he hath begun to puniſh, and is ingaged in the work, he is not hard to be taken off. There is a famous inſtance of this, 2 Sam. xxiv. when God had ſent three days peſtilence upon Iſrael, for David's ſin in numbering the people, and at the end of the third day, the angel of the Lord had ſtretched forth his hand over Jeruſalem, to deſtroy it; upon the prayer of David, it is ſaid, that "the Lord repent- "ed of the evil, and ſaid to the angel that deſtroy- "ed, It is enough; ſtay now thine hand." Nay, ſo ready is God to be taken off from this work, that he ſets a high value upon thoſe who ſtand in the gap to turn away his wrath; Numb. xxv. 11, 12, 13. "Phi- "nehas the ſon of Eleazar, the ſon of Aaron the prieſt, "hath turned my wrath away from the children of "Iſrael (while he was zealous for my ſake among "them) that I conſumed not the children of Iſrael "in my jealouſy. Wherefore ſay, Behold, I give un- "to him my covenant of peace. And he ſhall have "it, and his ſeed after him, even the covenant of an "everlaſting prieſthood; becauſe he was zealous for "his God, and made an atonement for the children "of Iſrael." That which God values in this action of Phinehas, next to his zeal for him, is, that "he "turned away his wrath, and made an atonement "for the children of Iſrael."

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5. and laſtly, The patience of GOD will yet appear with farther advantage, if we conſider ſome eminent and remarkable inſtances of it; which are ſo much the more conſiderable, becauſe they are inſtances not only of GOD's patience extended to a long time, but to a great many perſons. The long-ſuffering of GOD waited in the days of Noah upon the whole world, as is probably conjectured, for the ſpace of an hundred and twenty years. GOD bore with the people of Iſrael in the wilderneſs, after they had tempted him ten times, for the ſpace of forty years; Acts xiii. 18. "And about the time of for-"ty years ſuffered he their manners in the wilder-"neſs." And this inſtance of GOD's patience will be the more remarkable, if we compare it with the great impatience of that people; if they did but want fleſh or water, they were out of patience with GOD: when Moſes was in the mount with GOD but forty days, they preſently fall to make new gods; they had not the patience of forty days, and yet GOD bore their manners forty years. GOD had ſpared Nineveh for ſome ages; and when his patience was even expired, and he ſeems to have paſt a final ſentence upon it, yet he grants a reprieve for forty days, that they might ſue out their pardon in that time; and they did ſo; "they turned from their evil ways, "and GOD turned from the evil he ſaid he would do "them, and he did it not."

But the moſt remarkable inſtance of GOD's long-ſuffering is to the Jews, if we conſider it with all the circumſtances of it; after they had rejected the Son of GOD, notwithſtanding the purity of his doctrine, and the power of his miracles; after they had unjuſtly condemned, and cruelly "murdered the LORD of "life," yet the patience of GOD reſpited the ruin of that people forty years.

Beſides

Beſides all theſe, there are many inſtances of God's patience to particular perſons: but it were endleſs to enumerate theſe; every one of us may be an inſtance to our ſelves of God's long-ſuffering. SERM. CXLVIII.

I ſhall only add, as a farther advantage to ſet off the patience of God to ſinners, that his forbearance is ſo great, that he hath been complained of for it by his own ſervants. Job, who was ſo patient a man himſelf, thought much at it; Job xxi. 7, 8. "Where-"fore do the wicked live, become old, yea, are mighty "in power? Their ſeed is eſtabliſhed in their ſight "with them, and their offſpring before their eyes." Jonah challengeth God for it, chap. iv. 2. "Was "not this my ſaying, when I was yet in my coun-"try? and therefore I fled before unto Tarſhiſh; "for I know that thou art a gracious God, and mer-"ciful, ſlow to anger," &c. Jonah had obſerved God to be ſo prone to this, that he was loth to be ſent upon his meſſage, leſt God ſhould diſcredit his prophet, in not being ſo good (ſhall I ſay) ſo ſevere as his word.

I have done with the firſt thing I propoſed to ſpeak to, viz. The great patience and long-ſuffering of God to mankind.

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The patience of God.

2 PET. iii. 9.

The LORD *is not ſlack concerning his promiſe, (as ſome men count ſlackneſs) but is long-ſuffering to us-ward, not willing that any ſhould periſh, but that all ſhould come to repentance.*

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I Have made entrance into theſe words; in the handling of which, I propoſed to do theſe three things:

Firſt, to conſider the patience and long-ſuffering of GOD, as it is an attribute and perfection of the divine nature; "GOD is long-ſuffering to us-ward."

Secondly, to ſhew, that the patience of GOD, and the delay of his judgment, is no juſt ground why ſinners ſhould hope for impunity; "GOD is not "ſlack concerning his promiſe, as ſome men count "ſlackneſs."

Thirdly, to conſider the true reaſon of GOD's patience and long-ſuffering towards mankind; "He "is long-ſuffering to us-ward; not willing that any "ſhould periſh, but that all ſhould come to repen-"tance." I have already ſpoken to the

Firſt of theſe, namely, the patience and long-ſuffering of GOD, as it is an attribute and perfection of the divine nature. I proceed now to the

Second thing I propoſed, namely, to ſhew, that the patience of GOD, and the delay of judgment, is

no

no juſt ground why ſinners ſhould hope for impuni- SERM.
ty; "God is not ſlack concerning his promiſe, as CXLIX.
"ſome men count ſlackneſs;" that is, as the ſcoffers, here mentioned by the apoſtle, did ignorantly and maliciouſly reaſon, that becauſe our Lord delayed his coming to judgment ſo long, therefore he would never come.

There was, indeed, ſome pretence for this objection, becauſe the Chriſtians did generally apprehend that the day of judgment was very near, and that it would immediately follow the deſtruction of Jeruſalem; and it ſeems, the diſciples themſelves were of that perſuaſion before our Saviour's death; when our Saviour diſcourſing to them of the deſtruction of the temple, they put theſe two queſtions to him, Matt. xxiv. 3. "And as he ſat upon the mount of "Olives, the diſciples came unto him privately, ſay-"ing, Tell us when ſhall theſe things be? and what "ſhall be the ſign of thy coming, and of the end of "the world? When ſhall theſe things be?" that is, the things he had been ſpeaking of immediately before, viz. the deſtruction of Jeruſalem, and the diſſolution of the temple; that is plainly the meaning of the firſt queſtion; to which they ſubjoined another, "And what ſhall be the ſign of thy coming?" that is, to judgment, "and of the end of the world?" which, in all probability, was added to the former, becauſe they ſuppoſed that the one was preſently to follow the other, and therefore the ſame anſwer would ſerve them both: and it appears by our Saviour's anſwer, that he was not concerned to rectify them in this miſtake, which might be of good uſe to them, both to make them more zealous to propagate the goſpel, ſince there was like to be ſo little time for it; and likewiſe to wean their affections from this world, which they thought to be ſo near an end.

SERM. CXLIX. One thing, indeed, our SAVIOUR ſays, which (had they not been prepoſſeſſed with another opinion) does ſufficiently intimate, that there might be a conſiderable ſpace of time betwixt the deſtruction of Jeruſalem and the day of judgment; and this we find only in St. Luke, chap. xxi. 24. where, ſpeaking of the miſeries and calamities that ſhould come upon the Jews, he ſays, "They ſhall fall by the edge of "the ſword, and be carried into captivity into all "nations; and Jeruſalem ſhall be trodden down of "the Gentiles, until the time of the Gentiles be ful-"filled." So that here were a great many events foretold, betwixt the deſtruction of Jeruſalem and the end of the world, the accompliſhment whereof might take up a great deal of time, as appears by the event of things; Jeruſalem being at this day ſtill trodden down by the Gentiles, and the Jews ſtill continuing diſperſed over the world: but the diſciples, it ſeems, did not much mind this, being carried away with a prejudicate conceit, that the end of the world would happen before the end of that age; in which they were much confirmed by what our SAVIOUR, after his reſurrection, ſaid of St. John, upon occaſion of Peter's queſtion concerning him; John xxi. 21, 22. "LORD, what ſhall this man do? "JESUS ſaith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I "come, what is that to thee?" Upon which words of our SAVIOUR concerning him, St. John himſelf adds, ver. 23. "Then went this ſaying abroad a-"mong the brethren, that that diſciple ſhould not "die;" that is, that he ſhould live till the coming of our LORD, and then be taken up with him into heaven; from all which they probably (as they thought) concluded, that the day of judgment would happen before the end of that age, whilſt St. John was alive: but St. John, who writ laſt of all the evangeliſts

evangeliſts (as Euſebius tells us) and lived till after the deſtruction of Jeruſalem, as he acquaints us with this miſtake, which was current among the Chriſtians, o he takes care to rectify it, telling us, that "JESUS 'ſaid not, he ſhould not die; but, If I will that he 'tarry till I come, what is that to thee?" He tells us, that our SAVIOUR did not affirm that he ſhould not die; but, to repreſs St. Peter's curioſity, he ſays, 'If it were my pleaſure that he ſhould not die at 'all, but live till I come to judgment, what is that 'to thee?" And St. Peter likewiſe (or whoever was the author of this ſecond epiſtle, or at leaſt of his third chapter, which ſeems to be a new epiſtle by itſelf, takes notice of this miſtake, about the nearneſs of the day of judgment, as that which gave occaſion to theſe ſcoffers to deride the expectation of a future judgment among the Chriſtians, becauſe they had been already deceived about the time of it; and this the ſcoffers twitted them with in that queſtion, "Where is the promiſe of his coming?" Therefore the learned Grotius conjectures very probably, that this laſt epiſtle (contained in the third chapter) was written after the deſtruction of Jeruſalem, which was the time fixed for CHRIST's coming to judgment, and therefore there could be no ground for this ſcoff till after that time. St. Peter, indeed, did not live ſo long: and therefore Grotius thinks that this epiſtle was writ by Simeon, or Simon, who was ſucceſſor of St. James in the biſhoprick of Jeruſalem, and lived to the time of Trajan.

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I have been the longer in giving an account of this, that we might underſtand where the ground and force of this ſcoff lay; namely in this, that becauſe the Chriſtians had generally been very confident, that the coming of CHRIST to judgment would be preſently after the deſtruction of Jeruſalem, and were

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now found to be deceived in that, therefore there was no regard to be had at all to their expectation of a future judgment; becauſe they might be deceived in that, as well as in the other.

But herein they argued very falſly; becauſe our SAVIOUR had poſitively and peremptorily foretold his coming to judgment, but had never fixed and determined the time of it: nay, ſo far was he from that, that he had plainly told his diſciples that the preciſe time of the day of judgment GOD had reſerved as a ſecret to himſelf, which he had not imparted to any, no, not to the angels in heaven, nor to the Son himſelf; Mark xiii. 32, 33. "But of that day "and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels "which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Fa-"ther. Take ye heed, watch and pray; for ye know "not when the time is." So that if they preſumed to make any conjectures about the time when the day of judgment would be, they did it without any warrant from our LORD: it was great preſumption in them to determine the time of it, when our SAVIOUR had ſo expreſly told them that the Father had reſerved this as a ſecret, which he had never communicated to any, and therefore if they were miſtaken about it, it was no wonder. But their miſtake in this, was no prejudice to the truth of our SAVIOUR's clear prediction of a future judgment, without any determination of the time of it, for that might be at ſome thouſands of years diſtance, and yet be certain for all that; and the delay of it was no ſign of the uncertainty of our SAVIOUR's prediction concerning it, but only of GOD's great patience and long-ſuffering to ſinners, in expectation of their repentance; "GOD is not ſlack concerning his pro-"miſe, as ſome men count ſlackneſs, but is long-"ſuffering to us-ward." And this brings me to the

Third

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Third and laſt particular in the text, namely, the true reaſon of God's patience and long-ſuffering to mankind; "he is long-ſuffering to us-ward, not "willing that any ſhould periſh, but that all ſhould "come to repentance." And for this St. Peter cites St. Paul, ver. 15th of this chapter; "And account "that the long-ſuffering of the Lord is ſalvation;" that is, that the great end and deſign of God's goodneſs and long-ſuffering to ſinners, is, that they may repent, and be ſaved: "Account that the "long-ſuffering of our Lord is ſalvation, even as "our beloved brother Paul alſo, according to the "wiſdom given unto him, hath written unto you." Now theſe words are not expreſly found in St. Paul's writings: but the ſenſe and effect of them is, viz. in Rom. ii. 4. "Deſpiſeſt thou the riches of his "goodneſs, and forbearance, and long-ſuffering, "not knowing that the goodneſs of God leadeth "thee to repentance?" God hath a very gracious and merciful deſign in his patience to ſinners: he is good, that he may make us ſo, and that "his good-"neſs may lead us to repentance." He defers puniſhment on purpoſe, that he may give men time to bethink themſelves, and to return to a better mind: "he winks at the ſins of men, that they may re-"pent," ſays the ſon of Sirach. The patience of God aims at the cure and recovery of thoſe who are not deſperately and reſolutely wicked.

This is the primary end and intention of God's patience to ſinners; and if he fail of this end, through our hardneſs and impenitency, he hath other ends, which he will infallibly attain: he will hereby glorify the riches of his mercy, and vindicate the righteouſneſs of his juſtice: the damned in hell ſhall acknowledge, that the patience of God was great mercy and goodneſs to them, though they abuſed it; for God does

SERM. CXLIX. does not loſe the glory of his patience, though we loſe the benefit of it, and he will make it ſubſervient to his juſtice one way or other. Thoſe great offenders whom he ſpares, after there are no hopes of their amendment, he, many times, makes uſe of, as inſtruments for the puniſhing of others, as "rods of "his wrath, for the diſcipline of the world;" and he often reſerves thoſe who are incorrigibly bad for a more remarkable ruin. But, however, they are reſerved to the judgment of the great day; and if, after God hath exerciſed much patience towards ſinners in this world, he inflicts puniſhment on them in the next, it muſt be acknowledged to be moſt juſt; for what can he do leſs, than to condemn thoſe who would not be ſaved, and to make them miſerable who ſo obſtinately refuſed to be happy?

Before I come to apply this diſcourſe concerning the patience and long-ſuffering of God to ſinners, I muſt remove an objection or two:

I. The ſeverity of God to ſome ſinners in this life, and to all impenitent ſinners in the next, ſeems to contradict what hath been ſaid concerning God's patience and long-ſuffering.

As for the ſeverity of God towards impenitent ſinners in the next life, this doth not at all contradict the patience of God; becauſe the very nature of patience, and forbearance, and long-ſuffering, does ſuppoſe a determinate time, and that they will not laſt always: this life is the day of God's patience, and in the next world his juſtice and ſeverity will take place: and therefore the puniſhment of ſinners in another world, after God hath tried them in this, and expected their repentance, is no ways contrary to his patience and goodneſs, and very agreeable to his wiſdom and juſtice; for it is no part of goodneſs, to ſee itſelf perpetually abuſed; it is not patience, but

but ſtupidity and inſenſibleneſs, to endure to be always trampled upon, and to bear to have his holy and juſt laws for ever deſpiſed and contemned. SERM. CXLIX.

And as for his ſeverity to ſome ſinners in this life; as to Lot's wife, to the Iſraelite that gathered ſticks on the ſabbath-day, to Nadab and Abihu, to Uzzah, to Ananias and Sapphira, and to Herod Agrippa; in all which inſtances God ſeems to have made quick work, and to have executed judgment ſpeedily: to theſe I anſwer, That this ſeverity of God to ſome few, doth rather magnify his patience to the reſt of mankind; he may be ſevere to ſome few, for example and warning to many, that they may learn to make better uſe of his patience, and not to treſpaſs ſo boldly upon it; and, perhaps, he hath exerciſed much patience already towards thoſe to whom at laſt he is ſo ſevere; as is plain in the caſe of Herod, and it may well be ſuppoſed in moſt of the other inſtances; or elſe the ſin ſo ſuddenly and ſeverely puniſhed, was very heinous and preſumptuous, of a contagious and ſpreading nature, and of dangerous example. Lot's wife ſinned moſt preſumptuouſly againſt an expreſs and an eaſy command, and whilſt God was taking care of her deliverance in a very extraordinary manner. That of Nadab and Abihu, and of the man that gathered ſticks on the ſabbath-day, were preſently after the giving of the law, in which caſe great ſeverity is neceſſary; and that of Ananias and Sapphira, at the firſt publiſhing of the goſpel, that the majeſty of the divine Spirit, and the authority of the firſt publiſhers of it, might not be contemned: That of Uzzah was upon the return of the ark of God from among the Philiſtines, that the people might not loſe their reverence for it, after it had been taken captive. So that theſe neceſſary ſeverities to a few, in compariſon of thoſe many that are warned

by

SERM. CXLIX. by them, are rather arguments of GOD's patience, than objections againſt it.

II. It is objected, That if GOD do not deſire the ruin of ſinners, but their repentance, whence comes it to paſs that all are not brought to repentance? for who hath reſiſted his will? To this I anſwer,

1. That there is no doubt but GOD is able to do this. He can, if he pleaſeth, conquer and reclaim the moſt obſtinate ſpirits; he is able out of "ſtones "to raiſe up children unto Abraham." And ſometimes he exerts his omnipotence herein, as in the converſion of St. Paul, in a kind of violent and irreſiſtible manner: but he hath no where declared that he will do this to all; and we ſee plainly, in experience, that he does not do it.

2. God may very well be ſaid, "not to be will-"ing that any ſhould periſh, but that all ſhould "come to repentance," when he does, on his part, what is ſufficient to that end; and upon this ground the ſcripture every where repreſents GOD as deſiring the repentance of ſinners, and their obedience to his laws: Deut. v. 29. "O that there were ſuch an "heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep "all my commandments always, that it might be "well with them!" So Jer. xiii. 27. "O Jeruſalem, "wilt thou not be made clean? when ſhall it once "be?" If. v. 3, 4. we find GOD there ſolemnly appealing to the people of Iſrael, whether there had been any thing wanting on his part that was fit to be done; "And now, O inhabitants of Jeruſalem, "and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me "and my vineyard, what could have been done "more to my vineyard, that I have not done to it? "wherefore when I looked that it ſhould bring forth "grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?" GOD may juſtly look for the fruits of repentance and obedience

from

rom thoſe to whom he affords a ſufficiency of means o that end. And if ſo, then, SERM. CXLIX.

3. The true reaſon why men do not repent, but eriſh, is becauſe they are obſtinate, and will not re-ent: and this account the ſcripture every where ives of the impenitency of men, and the ruin con-equent upon it. Pſal. lxxxi. 13. "O that my peo-'ple had hearkened unto me, and Iſrael had walk-'ed in my ways! But my people would not hark-'en to my voice, and Iſrael would none of me." Ezek. xxxiii. 11. "Why will ye die, O houſe of Iſra-'el?" Prov. i. 29, 30, 31. "That they hated know-'ledge, and did not chuſe the fear of the Lord. 'They would none of my counſel; they de-'ſpiſed all my reproof. Therefore they ſhall eat of 'the fruit of their own ways, and be filled with 'their own devices." The ruin of ſinners doth ot proceed from the counſel of God, but from their wn choice. And ſo likewiſe our Saviour every where chargeth the ruin and deſtruction of the Jews upon their own wilful obſtinacy.

The inferences from this diſcourſe, concerning the patience and long-ſuffering of God towards mankind, ſhall be theſe three:

I. To ſtir us up to a thankful acknowledgment of the great patience of God towards us, notwithſtanding our manifold and heinous provocations. We may every one of us take to our ſelves thoſe words, Lam. iii. 22. "It is of the Lord's mercy that we "are not conſumed, becauſe his compaſſions fail not." They are "renewed every morning." Whenever we ſin (and "we provoke God every day") it is of his "patience that we are not deſtroyed:" and when we ſin again, this is a new and greater inſtance of God's patience. The mercies of God's patience are no more to be numbered than our ſins: we may

SERM. CXLIX.

ſay with David, "How great is the ſum of them?" The goodneſs of GOD in ſparing us, is, in ſome reſpect, greater than his goodneſs in creating us; becauſe he had no provocation not to make us, but we provoke him daily to deſtroy us.

II. Let us propound the patience of GOD for a pattern to our ſelves. Plutarch ſays, "That GOD "ſets forth himſelf in the midſt of the world for our "imitation, and propounds to us the example of "his patience, to teach us not to revenge injuries "haſtily upon one another."

III. Let us comply with the deſign of GOD's patience and long-ſuffering towards us, which is "to "bring us to repentance." Men are very apt to abuſe it to a quite contrary purpoſe, to the encouraging themſelves in their evil ways. So Solomon obſerves, Eccl. viii. 11. "Becauſe ſentence againſt "an evil work is not executed ſpeedily, therefore "the heart of the ſons of men is fully ſet in them to "do evil:" But this is very falſe reaſoning; for the patience of GOD is an enemy to ſin, as well as his juſtice; and the deſign of it is not to countenance ſin, but to convert the ſinner: Rom. ii. 4. "Deſpiſeſt thou the riches of his goodneſs, and for"bearance, and long-ſuffering? not knowing that "the goodneſs of GOD leadeth thee to repentance?" Patience in GOD ſhould produce repentance in us; and we ſhould look upon it as an opportunity given us by GOD to repent and be ſaved; 2 Pet. iii. 15. "Account that the long-ſuffering of GOD is ſalva"tion." They that do not improve the patience of GOD to their own ſalvation, miſtake the true meaning and intent of it. But many are ſo far from making this uſe of it, that they preſume upon it, and ſin with more courage and confidence becauſe

of

of it: but that we may be ſenſible of the danger of this, I will offer theſe two or three conſiderations; SERM. CXLIX.

1. That nothing is more provoking to God, than the abuſe of his patience. God's patience waits for our repentance; and all long attendance, even of inferiors upon their ſuperiors, hath ſomething in it that is grievous: how much more grievous and provoking muſt it be to the great God, after he hath laid out upon us all the riches of his goodneſs and long-ſuffering, to have that deſpiſed? after his patience hath waited a long time upon us, not only to be thruſt away with contempt, but to have that which ſhould be an argument to us to leave our ſins, abuſed into an encouragement to continue in them? God takes an account of all the days of his patience and forbearance; Luke xiii. 7. "Behold, theſe three "years I come ſeeking fruit on this fig-tree, and find "none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?"

2. Conſider that the patience of God will have an end. Though God ſuffers long, he will not ſuffer always; we may provoke God ſo long, till he can forbear no longer without injury and diſhonour to his wiſdom and juſtice, and holineſs; and God will not ſuffer one attribute to wrong the reſt: his wiſdom will determine the length of his patience; and when his patience is to no purpoſe, when there is no hopes of our amendment, his wiſdom will then put a period to it; then the patience of his mercy will determine. "How often would I have gathered "you, and you would not? therefore your houſe is "left unto you deſolate." And the patience of God's judgments will then determine; "Why "ſhould they be ſmitten any more? they will revolt "more and more." Yea, patience itſelf, after a long and fruitleſs expectation, will expire. A ſinner may continue ſo long impenitent, till the patience of

God,

SERM. CXLIX.

God, as I may ſay, grows impenitent, and then our ruin will make haſte, and deſtruction "will "come upon us in a moment." If men will not come to repentance, "the day of the Lord will "come as a thief in the night," as it follows in the next verſe after the text; the judgment of God will ſuddenly ſurprize thoſe who will not be gained by his patience.

3. Conſider that nothing will more haſten and aggravate our ruin, than the abuſe of God's patience. All this time of God's patience, his wrath is coming towards us; and the more we preſume upon it, the ſooner it will overtake us; Luke xii. 45, 46. The wicked ſervant, who ſaid his Lord delayed his coming, and fell to rioting and drunkenneſs, our Saviour tells us, "that the lord of that ſervant will come "in a day when he looks not for him."

And it will aggravate our ruin; the longer puniſhment is a coming, the heavier it will be: thoſe things which are long in preparation, are terrible in execution; the weight of God's wrath will make amends for the ſlowneſs of it; and the delay of judgment will be fully recompenſed in the dreadfulneſs of it when it comes.

Let all thoſe conſider this who go on in their ſin, and are deaf to the voice of God's patience, which calls upon them every moment of their lives. There is a day of vengeance a coming upon thoſe who trifle away this day of God's patience; nothing will ſooner and more inflame the wrath and diſpleaſure of God againſt us, than his abuſed patience, and the deſpiſed riches of his goodneſs. As oil, though it be ſoft and ſmooth, yet, when it is once inflamed, burns moſt fiercely; ſo the patience of God, when it is abuſed, turns into fury; and his mildeſt attributes into the greateſt ſeverities.

And

SERM. CXLIX.

And if the patience of God do not bring us to repentance, it will but prepare us for a more intolerable ruin: after God hath kept a long indignation in his breaſt, it will, at length, break forth with the greater violence. The patience of God encreaſeth his judgments by an incredible kind of proportion; Levit. xxvi. 18. "And if you will ſtill (ſays God to the people of Iſrael) "walk contrary to me, and if "ye will not be reformed by all theſe things, I will "puniſh you yet ſeven times more." And ver. 28: "I will bring ſeven times more plagues upon you; "according to your ſins." At firſt God's juſtice accuſeth ſinners; but, after a long time of patience, his mercy comes in againſt us, and, inſtead of ſtaying his hand, adds weight to his blows; Rom. ix. 22. "What if God, willing to ſhew his wrath, and "to make his power known, endured with much "long-ſuffering the veſſels of wrath fitted for de"ſtruction?" They upon whom the patience of God hath no good effect, are "veſſels of wrath, pre"pared and fitted for deſtruction." If ever God diſplay his wrath, and make his anger known, he will do it in the moſt ſevere manner upon thoſe who have deſpiſed and abuſed his patience; for theſe, in a more peculiar manner, "do treaſure up for them"ſelves wrath againſt the day of wrath, and the "revelation of the righteous judgment of God."

To conclude: let us all take a review of our lives, and conſider how long the patience of God hath waited upon us, and borne with us; with ſome, twenty, forty, perhaps ſixty years, and longer. Do we not remember how God ſpared us in ſuch a danger, when we gave ourſelves for loſt? And how he recovered us in ſuch a ſickneſs, when the phyſician gave us up for gone? And what uſe have we made of this patience and long-ſuffering of God to-

SERM. CXLIX. towards us? It is the worſt temper in the world, not to be melted by kindneſs, not to be obliged by benefits, not to be tamed by gentle uſage. He that is not wrought upon, neither by the patience of his mercy, nor by the patience of his judgments, his caſe is deſperate, and paſt remedy. "Conſider this, "all ye that forget GOD," leſt his patience turn into fury; for "GOD is not ſlack, as ſome men count "ſlackneſs; but long-ſuffering to ſinners, not wil-"ling that any ſhould periſh, but that all ſhould "come to repentance."

SERMON CL.

The long-ſuffering of GOD.

ECCLES. viii. 11.

Becauſe ſentence againſt an evil work is not executed ſpeedily, therefore the heart of the ſons of men is fully ſet in them to do evil.

SERM. CL. NOTHING is more evident, than that the world lies in wickedneſs, and that iniquity every where abounds; and yet nothing is more certain, than that GOD will not acquit the guilty, and let ſin go unpuniſhed. All men, excepting thoſe who have offered notorious violence to the light of their own minds, and have put the candle of the LORD, which is in them, under a buſhel, do believe that there is a God in the world, to whoſe holy nature and will ſin is perfectly contrary, "who loves righteouſ-"neſs and hates iniquity," that "his eyes are upon "the

" the ways of man, and he ſeeth all his goings;" SERM. CL.
that " there is no darkneſs, nor ſhadow of death,
" where the workers of iniquity may hide them-
" ſelves." All men, except thoſe whoſe conſciences are ſeared, as it were, with an hot iron, are convinced of the difference of good and evil, and that it is not all one whether men ſerve God or ſerve him not, do well, or live wickedly. Every man, from his inward ſenſe and experience, is ſatisfied of his own liberty, and that God lays upon men no neceſſity of ſinning, but that whenever we do amiſs, it is our own act, and we chuſe to do ſo; and ſo far is he from giving the leaſt countenance to ſin, that he hath given all imaginable diſcouragement to it, by the moſt ſevere and terrible threatenings, ſuch as one would think ſufficient to deter men for ever from it, and to drive it out of the world; and to make his threatenings the more awful and effectual, his providence hath not been wanting to give remarkable inſtances of his juſtice and ſeverity upon notorious offenders, even in this life; and yet, for all this, men do, and will ſin; nay, they are zealouſly ſet and bent upon it.

Now here is the wonder; what it is that gives ſinners ſuch heart, and makes them ſo reſolute and undaunted in ſo dangerous a courſe. Solomon gives us this account of it; becauſe the puniſhments and judgments of God follow the ſins of men ſo ſlowly, and are long before they overtake the ſinner. " Be-
" cauſe ſentence againſt an evil work is not executed
" ſpeedily, therefore the hearts of the ſons of men
" are fully ſet in them to do evil."

The ſcope of the wiſe man's diſcourſe is this; that by reaſon of God's forbearance and long-ſuffering towards ſinners in this life, it is not ſo eaſy to diſcern the difference between them and other men;

SERM. CL.

this life is the day of God's patience, but the next will be a day of retribution and recompence. Now becauſe God doth defer and moderate the puniſhment of ſinners in this world, and reſerve the weight of his judgments to the next; becauſe, through the long-ſuffering of God, many great ſinners live and die without any remarkable teſtimony of God's wrath and diſpleaſure againſt them, "therefore the "hearts of the children of men are fully ſet in them "to do evil."

If we render the text word for word from the original, it runs thus; "Becauſe nothing is done as a "recompence to an evil work, therefore the hearts "of the ſons of men are full in them to do evil;" that is, becauſe men are not oppoſed, and contradicted in their evil ways, becauſe divine juſtice doth not preſently check and control ſinners, becauſe ſentence is not immediately paſt upon them, and judgment executed, therefore the heart of the ſons of men is full in them to do evil; that is, therefore men grow bold and preſumptuous in ſin; for the Hebrew word which we render, "is fully ſet in "them," we find Eſth. vii. 5. where Ahaſuerus ſays concerning Haman, "Who is he? and where "is he that durſt preſume in his heart to do ſo? "whoſe heart was full to do ſo," *Fervet in iis cor filiorum hominum*; ſo ſome render it, "the hearts "of men boil with wickedneſs," are ſo full of it, that it works over. Men are reſolute in an evil courſe, "their hearts are ſtrengthened and hardened "in them to do evil," ſo others tranſlate the words. The tranſlation of the LXX is very emphatical, ἐπληροφορήθη καρδία, "the heart of the ſons of men "is fully perſuaded and aſſured to do evil." All theſe tranſlations agree in the main ſcope and ſenſe, viz. That ſinners are very apt to preſume upon the long-

long-ſuffering of God, and to abuſe it, to the hardening and encouraging of themſelves in their evil ways. In the handling of this, I ſhall SERM. CL.

Firſt, briefly ſhew that it is ſo.

Secondly, whence this comes to paſs, and upon what pretences and colours of reaſon, men encourage themſelves in ſin, from the patience of God.

Thirdly, I ſhall endeavour to anſwer an objection about this matter.

Firſt, that men are very apt to abuſe the long-ſuffering of God, to the encouraging and hardening of themſelves in an evil courſe, the experience of the world, in all ages, does give abundant teſtimony. Thus it was with the old world, "when the long-ſuf-"fering of God waited in the days of Noah, while he "was preparing an ark, for the ſpace of an hundred and "twenty years," 1 Pet. iii. 20. For the wickedneſs of man, which was great upon the earth, a general deluge was threatened; but God was patient, and delayed his judgment a great while: hereupon they grew ſecure in their impenitency, and went on in their courſe, as if they had no apprehenſion of danger, no fear of the judgment threatened. So our Saviour tells us, Matth. xxiv. 38, 39. "As in the days that were be-"fore the flood, they were eating and drinking, "marrying and giving in marriage, until the day "that Noah entred into the ark, and knew not un-"till the flood came, and took them all away." And ſo it was with Sodom, Luke xvii. 28. And "likewiſe alſo as it was in the days of Lot, they eat, "they drank, they bought, they ſold, they plant-"ed, they built." And ſo, our Saviour tells us, it will be in the end of the world; "Even thus "ſhall it be in the day when the ſon of man is re-"vealed." So likewiſe the apoſtle St. Paul, Rom. ii. 4, 5. "Deſpiſeſt thou the riches of his goodneſs,

SERM. CL. " and forbearance, and long-ſuffering, not knowing " that the goodneſs of GOD leadeth thee to repen- " tance? But after thy hardneſs and impenitent " heart, treaſureſt up to thy ſelf wrath againſt the " day of wrath, and the revelation of the righteous " judgment of GOD." The goodneſs and long-ſuffering of GOD, which ought in all reaſon to lead men to repentance, is to many an occaſion of greater hardneſs and impenitency. So alſo St. Peter foretels, 2 Pet. iii. 3. " that in the laſt days there ſhould " come ſcoffers, who ſhould walk after their own " hearts luſts, ſaying, where is the promiſe of his " coming?" And we ſee, in daily experience, that the greateſt part of ſinners grow more obſtinate and confirmed in their wicked ways, upon account of GOD's patience, and becauſe he delays the puniſhment due to them for their ſins. Let us conſider, in the

Second place, whence this comes to paſs, and upon what pretence and colour of reaſon men encourage themſelves in ſin, from the long-ſuffering of GOD. And there is no doubt but this proceeds from our ignorance and inconſiderateneſs, and from an evil heart of unbelief, from the temptation and ſuggeſtion of the devil, one of whoſe great arts it is, to make men queſtion the threatenings of GOD, and to inſinuate, as he did to our firſt parents, either that he hath not denounced ſuch threatenings, or that he will not execute them ſo ſeverely. All theſe cauſes do concur to the producing this monſtrous effect; but that which I deſign to inquire into, is from what pretence of reaſon, grounded upon the long-ſuffering of GOD, ſinners argue themſelves into this confidence and preſumption. For when the wiſe man ſaith, that " becauſe ſentence againſt an " evil work is not executed ſpeedily, therefore the

" heart

SERM. CL.

" heart of the ſons of men is fully ſet in them to do " evil," he does not intend to inſinuate, that God's long-ſuffering fills the hearts of men with wicked deſigns and reſolutions, and does, by a proper and direct efficacy, harden ſinners in their courſe; but that wicked men, upon ſome account or other, do take occaſion, from the long-ſuffering of God, to harden themſelves in ſin; they draw falſe concluſions from it to impoſe upon themſelves, as if it were really a ground of encouragement; they think they ſee ſomething in the forbearance of God, and his delay of puniſhment, which makes them hope for impunity in an evil courſe, notwithſtanding the threatenings of God.

And therefore I ſhall endeavour to ſhew, what thoſe falſe concluſions are, which wicked men draw from the delay of puniſhment, and to diſcover the ſophiſtry and fallacy of them: and I ſhall rank them under two heads; thoſe which are more groſs and atheiſtical, and thoſe which are not ſo groſs, but yet more common and frequent.

I. Thoſe concluſions which are more groſs and atheiſtical, which bad men draw to the hardening and encouraging of themſelves in ſin, from the delay of puniſhment, (which we, who believe a God, call the patience or long-ſuffering of God) are theſe three; either that there is no God: or if there be, that there is no providence; or that there is no difference between good and evil.

I ſhall ſpeak more briefly of theſe, becauſe I hope there are but few in the world of ſuch irregular and beſotted underſtandings, as to make ſuch inferences as theſe from the delay of puniſhment.

1ſt. From hence ſome would fain conclude, that there is no God. That ſome are ſo abſurd as to reaſon in this manner, the ſcripture tells us, Pſal. xiv.

SERM. I. CL. "The fool hath ſaid in his heart, there is no GOD: "they are corrupt, and have done abominable "works." Now the argument that theſe men frame to themſelves, is this; GOD doth not take a ſpeedy courſe with ſinners, and revenge himſelf immediately upon the workers of iniquity, therefore there is no GOD; for if there were, he would ſhew himſelf, and not bear the affronts of ſinners, when it is ſo eaſy for him to vindicate himſelf by a ſwift and ſpeedy vengeance. Thus the poet repreſents the atheiſt arguing; *Nullos eſſe deos, inane cælum, affirmat Selius, probatque, quod ſe factum, dum negat hoc, videt beatum.* "Selius affirms, there are no gods, and "that heaven is an empty place, and proves it, "becauſe, whilſt he denies GOD, he ſees himſelf in a "very happy and proſperous condition."

And here it is worthy our notice, at what a contradictious rate theſe men reaſon. Firſt, they would have no GOD, leſt he ſhould be juſt, and puniſh them as they deſerved; and then, in another mood, they would have him to be nothing but juſtice and ſeverity, leſt there ſhould be a GOD; as if no other notion could be framed of the divine nature, but of a raſh fury, and impetuous revenge, and an impotent paſſion, which when it is offended and provoked, cannot contain itſelf, and forbear puniſhment for a moment. Juſtice is not ſuch a perfection as doth neceſſarily exclude wiſdom, and goodneſs, and patience; it doth in no wiſe contradict the perfection of the divine nature to bear with ſinners, in expectation of their repentance and amendment; or if GOD foreſees their final impenitency, to reſpite their puniſhment to the moſt fit and convenient ſeaſon. GOD may ſuffer long, and yet be reſolved, if ſinners perſiſt in the abuſe of his goodneſs and patience, to execute vengeance upon them in due time. It is a pitiful

ground

f atheiſm, that becauſe God is ſo much bet- SERM.
wicked men deſerve, they will not allow CL.
e at all.

Others infer from the delay of puniſhment,
: is no providence that adminiſters the affairs
rld, and regards the good and bad actions

For though the being of God be acknow-
'et if he do not regard what is done here
or concern himſelf in human affairs, ſinners
e and free to do what they pleaſe, as if there
God; and upon this ground, the ſcripture
many encourage themſelves in their wick-
Pſal. lxiv. 5. "They encourage themſelves
:vil matter, they commune of laying ſnares
r; they ſay, Who ſhall ſee them?" And
)reſly, Pſal. xciv. 4, 5, 6, 7. "How long
hey utter and ſpeak hard things, and all
)rkers of iniquity boaſt themſelves? They
in pieces thy people, O Lord, and af-
hine heritage. They ſlay the widow and
ranger, and murder the fatherleſs. Yet
ay, The Lord ſhall not ſee, neither ſhall
)D of Jacob regard it." And if this were
might they encourage themſelves. If it
: whi h Epicurus ſaith, "That God takes
)wledge of the actions of men, that he is
noved from us; and contented with him-
nd not at all concerned in what we do;"
re true, the inference which Lucretius makes,
y juſt; *Quare religio pedibus ſubjecta viciſſim*
; "Men might trample religion under their
nd live without any regard to the laws of it."
t us ſee how they infer this from the long-
of God, that he neglects the affairs of the
nd hath no conſideration of the actions of
cauſe they ſee the ungodly to proſper in the

world,

SERM. CL.

world, equally with others that are ſtrictly devout and virtuous, yea, many times, to be in a more proſperous and flouriſhing condition; "they are not in "trouble like other men, neither are they plagued "like other men." So that if there be a God, it ſeems (ſay they) that he connives at the crimes of men, and "looks on upon them that deal treacherouſly, "and holds his peace, whilſt the wicked devoureth "the man that is more righteous than himſelf:" as the prophet expreſſeth it, Hab. i. 13.

For anſwer to this, I ſhall only give this reaſonable and credible account of the long-ſuffering of God, and the impunity of wicked men in this life, which not only the ſcripture gives us, but the heathen were able to give from the light of nature, and is agreeable to the common ſenſe of mankind; namely, that this life is a ſtate of probation and trial, wherein God "ſuffers men to walk in their own ways" without any viſible check and reſtraint, and does not uſually inflict preſent and remarkable puniſhments upon them for their evil deeds; becauſe this being a ſtate of trial of the diſpoſitions and manners of men, is rather the proper ſeaſon of patience, than of puniſhments and rewards; and therefore it is very reaſonable to ſuppoſe, that God reſerves ſinners for a ſolemn and publick trial at the great aſſizes of the world, when he will openly vindicate the honour of his juſtice upon the deſpiſers of his patience and long-ſuffering, when he will make "his judgment to break forth as the light, "and his righteouſneſs as the noon-day." In the mean time the providence of God, when he ſees it fit, gives ſome remarkable inſtances of his juſtice upon great and notorious offenders in this life, as a pledge and earneſt of a future judgment; and theſe ſometimes more general, as in the deſtruction of the

vorld by an univerſal deluge, when "he ſaw SERM.
e wickedneſs of men to be great upon the earth." CL.
ſuch was that terrible vengeance which was
ed down upon Sodom and Gomorrah, and the
about them; which, as St. Jude tells us, "are
forth for an example, ſuffering the vengeance of e-
nal fire," that is, of a perpetual deſtruction by fire.
ly. Another groſs and atheiſtical inference, which
are apt to make from the delay of puniſhment
nat there is no ſuch difference of good and evil
pretended; becauſe they do not ſee the good
bad actions of men differenced in their rewards,
ıſe divine juſtice doth not preſently manifeſt it-
and "every tranſgreſſion and diſobedience"
not immediately "receive a juſt recompence
reward," therefore they cannot believe, that
ifference between good and evil is ſo great
evident,

or anſwer to this: Not to inſiſt upon the dif-
ce which the providence of God ſometimes
s between them in this life, I appeal to the
iences of men, whether they do not ſecretly
nwardly acknowledge a clear difference between
and evil. Are not the worſt of men apt to
ive better hopes of ſucceſs, when they are a-
a juſt and honeſt undertaking, than when they
ngaged in a wicked deſign? Do not bad men
ı ſecret ſhame and horror, when no eye ſees
, and the wickedneſs they are about to commit
not fall under the cognizance and cenſure of any
an court or tribunal? Have they not many
cs and rebukes in their own ſpirits, much diſtur-
e and confuſion of mind, when they are enter-
ng a wicked thing? And does not this plainly
e; that they are guilty to themſelves that they
bout ſomething which they ought not to do?

It

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It is very true, that moſt men are more ſenſible of the evil of an action, when they feel the ill effects and conſequences of it, and ſuffer the puniſhment that is due to it: but yet the ſenſe of good and evil is ſo deeply impreſt upon human nature, that I think no man, remaining a man, can quite deface and blot out the difference of good and evil. So that if men will but attend to the natural dictates and ſuggeſtions of their own minds, they cannot poſſibly infer, from the delay of puniſhment, that there is no difference of good and evil.

But becauſe thoſe who argue thus are but few, in compariſon, there being not many in the world arrived to that degree of blindneſs, and height of impiety, as to diſbelieve a God, and a providence; and I think none have attained to that perfect conqueſt of conſcience, as to have loſt all ſenſe of good and evil; therefore I ſhall rather inſiſt,

II. Upon thoſe kind of reaſonings which are more ordinary and common among bad men, and whereby they cheat themſelves into everlaſting perdition; and they are ſuch as theſe:

1. Becauſe ſentence againſt an evil work is not ſpedily executed, therefore ſin is not ſo great an evil.

2. Therefore God is not ſo highly offended and provoked by it. Or,

3. God is not ſo ſevere in his own nature, as he is commonly repreſented.

4. Therefore the puniſhment of ſin is not ſo certain. Or, however,

5. It is at a diſtance, and may be prevented time enough, by a future repentance, in our old age, or at the hour of death; by ſome ſuch falſe reaſonings as theſe, which men think may probably be collected from the patience and long-ſuffering of God, they harden and encourage themſelves in an evil courſe.

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1. Becauſe the puniſhment of ſin is deferred, herefore they conclude it is not ſo great an evil: hey do not feel the ill effects of it at preſent; all hings go well and proſperouſly with them, no leſs han with thoſe who are ſo ſtrict and conſcientious; nd therefore they hope there is no ſuch great evil n ſin, as melancholy people are apt to fancy to hemſelves. For anſwer to this,

(1.) Conſider ſeriouſly what ſin is, and then thou vilt ſee reaſon enough to call it a great evil. To ſin gainſt God, is to contemn the greateſt authority in he world, to contradict the greateſt holineſs and urity, to abuſe the greateſt goodneſs, and to pro-oke almighty juſtice to take vengeance upon thee, nd to make thee as miſerable as thou art capable of eing. To ſin againſt God, is to be diſobedient to hy ſovereign, and unthankful to thy beſt benefac-or, and to act contrary to the greateſt obligations, gainſt thy beſt reaſon and trueſt intereſt; to diſ-oblige thy kindeſt friend, and to gratify thy worſt nd bittereſt enemy; it is to diſorder thyſelf, to reate perpetual diſquiet to thy own mind, and to lo the greateſt miſchief poſſible to thyſelf; to de-prive thyſelf of the greateſt happineſs, and to draw lown upon thyſelf extreme and eternal miſery. And what do we call a great evil, if this be not, which contains in it all the kinds, and all the aggravations of evil that can be, and hath all the circumſtances of uglineſs and deformity in it that can be imagined?

(2.) Whatever ſin be in itſelf, yet from hence we can in no wiſe conclude, that it is not a great evil, becauſe the puniſhment of it is deferred for a while; from hence indeed it follows, that God is very good in deferring the puniſhment which is due to thee for thy ſins, but by no means that ſin is not very evil. The reprieve of a traitor does indeed argue the goodneſs

and

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and clemency of the prince, but doth not at all abate of the heinouſneſs of the crime for which he is ſentenced. The great evil of ſin is evident, becauſe the holy and juſt GOD hath forbidden it, and declared his hatred and deteſtation of it, and threatened it with moſt ſevere and direful puniſhment; but that GOD reſpites the puniſhment which is due to ſin, and does not immediately take vengeance upon ſinners, but affords them a ſpace, and means, and opportunity of repentance: this doth not at all leſſen the evil of ſin, but is rather an aggravation of it; that we ſhould offend and provoke that GOD, who is ſo patient and long-ſuffering towards us, ſo very loth to bring thoſe evils upon us, which we are ſo raſh and forward to pull down upon ourſelves.

2. If GOD doth not immediately puniſh ſin upon the commiſſion of it, and inſtantly let fly at the ſinner, this they would conſtrue to be a ſign that he is not ſo highly offended and provoked by it; if he were, he would manifeſt his diſpleaſure againſt it, by the ſudden and violent effuſions of his wrath. For anſwer to this, I deſire theſe two things may be conſidered:

(1.) That GOD himſelf, in his word, every where plainly declares to us his great diſpleaſure againſt ſin; Pſal. v. 4, 5. "Thou art not a GOD that "haſt pleaſure in wickedneſs, neither ſhall evil dwell "with thee. The fooliſh ſhall not ſtand in thy "ſight; thou hateſt all the workers of iniquity. "Thou art not a GOD that haſt pleaſure in wicked-"neſs." The words are a μείωσις, and leſs is ſpoken than is meant and intended, viz. That GOD is ſo far from taking pleaſure in the ſins of men, that he is highly diſpleaſed at them, and bears an implacable hatred againſt them.

And do not the terrible threatenings of GOD againſt ſin

:clare him to be highly offended at it? When he SERM. CL.
that "he will come in flaming fire, to render
ngeance to all them that know not the goſpel of
i Son;" and that they "ſhall be puniſhed with
erlaſting deſtruction, from the preſence of the
ORD, and from the glory of his power." Can we
: that all the threatenings of God's word, and all
: direful curſes which are written in his book,
return empty, without doing any execution?
that now flattereſt thyſelf in vain and groundleſs
s, that none of theſe evils ſhall come upon thee,
ı thou comeſt to ſtand before the great Judge of
world, and to behold the killing frowns of his
tenance, and to hear thoſe bitter words of eter-
diſpleaſure from the mouth of God himſelf,
epart, ye curſed, into everlaſting fire, prepared
r the devil and his angels;" thou wilt then be-
that God is heartily angry and offended with
for thy ſins. We ſhall find in that day, that
threatenings of God's word, which we now
ſecurely, and without terror, had a full ſig-
ation; or rather, that no words could convey
; the terror of them. What the ſcripture ſays
ıe happineſs and glory of the next life, is true
of the miſery and puniſhments of the other
d, that "eye hath not ſeen, nor ear heard,
:ither have entred into the heart of man, thoſe
:rrible things which God hath reſerved for the
'orkers of iniquity."

ut, above all, the direful ſufferings of the Son
God, when ſin was but imputed to him, are a
onſtration of God's implacable hatred of ſin;
:hat rather than ſin ſhould go unpuniſhed, God
pleaſed to ſubject his own Son to the ſufferings
to it: this plainly ſhews, that he hated ſin as
h as he loved his own Son.

But,

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But, (2dly,) GOD may conceive a very great diſpleaſure againſt ſin, and be highly incenſed and provoked by it, and yet ſuſpend the effects of his diſpleaſure, and defer the puniſhment of it for a great while: and to imagine otherwiſe, argues a groſs miſtake of the nature of GOD, ariſing from our not conſidering the attributes and perfections of GOD in conjunction and conſiſtency with one another. When we conſider one attribute of GOD ſingly, and ſeparate it from the reſt, and frame ſuch wide and large apprehenſions of it, as to exclude his other perfections, we have a falſe notion of GOD; and the reaſon of this miſtake is, becauſe, among men, an eminent degree of any one excellency doth commonly ſhut out others; becauſe in our narrow and finite nature, many perfections cannot ſtand together; but it is quite otherwiſe in the divine nature. In infinite perfection, all perfections do meet and conſiſt together; one perfection doth not hinder and exclude another, and therefore in our conceptions of GOD, we are to take great heed that we do not raiſe any one attribute or perfection of GOD upon the ruin of the reſt.

So that it is a falſe imagination of GOD, when we ſo attribute juſtice or anger to him, as to exclude his patience and long-ſuffering: for GOD is not impotent in his anger, as we are; every thing that provokes him, doth not preſently put him out of patience, ſo that he cannot contain his wrath, and forbear immediately to revenge himſelf upon ſinners. In this ſenſe GOD ſays of himſelf, Iſa. xxvii. 4. "Fury "is not in me." There is nothing of a raſh and ungoverned paſſion in the wiſe and juſt GOD. Every ſin indeed kindles his anger, and provokes his diſpleaſure againſt us, and by our repeated and continued offences, we ſtill add fuel to his wrath; but it doth

doth not of neceſſity inſtantly break forth like "a "conſuming fire, and a devouring flame." The holy and righteous nature of God makes him neceſſarily offended and diſpleaſed with the ſins of men; but as to the manifeſtation of his wrath, and the effects of his anger, his wiſdom and goodneſs do regulate and determine the proper time and circumſtances of puniſhment. SERM. CL.

3. From the patience of God, and the delay of puniſhment, men are apt to conclude, that God is not ſo ſevere in his nature as he is commonly repreſented. It is true, he hath declared his diſpleaſure againſt ſin, and threatened it with dreadful puniſhments; which he may do, in great wiſdom, to keep the world in awe and order: but great things are likewiſe ſpoken of his mercy, and of the wonderful delight he takes in the exerciſe of his mercy: ſo that notwithſtanding all the threatenings which are denounced againſt ſin, it is to be hoped, that when ſentence comes to be paſt, and judgment to be executed, God will "remember mercy in the midſt of "judgment," and that "mercy will triumph over "judgment;" and that as now his patience ſtays his hand, and turns away his wrath, ſo at the laſt, the milder attributes of his goodneſs and mercy will interpoſe and moderate the rigour and ſeverity of his juſtice; and of this his great patience and long ſuffering towards ſinners for the preſent ſeems to be ſome kind of pledge and earneſt: he that is ſo ſlow to anger, and ſo loth to execute puniſhment, may probably be prevailed upon by his own pity and goodneſs to remit it at the laſt: and this is the more credible, becauſe it is granted on all hands, that no perſon is obliged to execute his threatenings, as he is to make good his promiſes; he that promiſeth paſſeth a right to another; but he that threateneth keeps

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the right and power of doing what he pleaſeth in his own hands.

I ſhall ſpeak a little more fully to this, becauſe it is almoſt incredible how much men bear up themſelves upon vain and groundleſs hopes of the boundleſs mercy of GOD, and "bleſs themſelves in their "hearts, ſaying, They ſhall have peace, though "they walk in the imagination of their hearts, "to add drunkenneſs to thirſt;" that is, though they ſtill perſiſt in their vices, and add one degree of ſin to another.

Now, for anſwer to this,

(1.) Let it be granted, that a bare threatening does not neceſſarily infer the certainty of the event; and that the thing threatened ſhall infallibly come to paſs: no perſon is obliged to perform his threatenings, as he is his promiſes; the threatenings of GOD declare what ſin deſerves, and what the ſinner may juſtly expect if he continue impenitent and incorrigible. But then we are to take notice, that repentance is the only condition that is implied in the threatenings of GOD, and will effectually hinder the execution of them: Jer. xviii. 7, 8, 9, 10. "At what inſtant "I ſpeak (ſays GOD) concerning a nation, and con-"cerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull "down, and to deſtroy it; if that nation againſt "whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I "will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto "them. And at what inſtant I ſhall ſpeak con-"cerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to "build and to plant it; if it do evil in my ſight, "and obey not my voice, then will I repent of the "good wherewith I ſaid I would benefit them." Now if when GOD hath promiſed to do good to a people, ſin will hinder the bleſſing promiſed, and bring down judgments upon them, much more when it is particularly threatened. But

But as to the caſe of final impenitency and unbe- SERM.
lief, God, that he might ſtrengthen his threatenings, CL.
hath added a ſign of immutability to them, having confirmed them with an oath; "I have ſworn (ſaith "the Lord) that they ſhall not enter into my reſt;" which, though it was ſpoken to the unbelieving Jews, the apoſtle to the Hebrews applies it to a final unbelief and impenitency under the goſpel, of which the infidelity of the Iſraelites was a type and figure. Now though God may remit of his threatenings: yet his oath is a plain declaration that he will not; becauſe it ſignifies the firm and immutable determination of his will, and thereby puts an end to all doubts and controverſies concerning the fulfilling of his threatenings.

(2.) It is certainly much the wiſeſt and ſafeſt way, to believe the threatenings of God, in the ſtrictneſs and rigour of them, unleſs there be ſome tacit condition evidently implied in them; becauſe if we do not believe them, and the thing prove otherwiſe, the conſequence of our miſtake is fatal and dreadful. It is true indeed, that God by his threatenings did intend to keep ſinners in awe, and to deter them from ſin: but if he had any where revealed, that he would not be rigorous in the execution of theſe threatenings, ſuch a revelation would quite take off the edge and terror of them, and contradict the end and deſign of them; for threatenings ſignify very little, but upon this ſuppoſition, that in all probability they will be executed: and if this be true, it is the greateſt madneſs and folly in the world to run the hazard of it.

(3.) As for thoſe large declarations which the ſcripture makes of the boundleſs mercy of God to ſinners, we are to limit them, as the ſcripture hath done, to the time and ſeaſon of mercy, which is this life, and *while we are in the way.* This is the day

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of mercy and ſalvation; and when this life is ended, the opportunities of grace and mercy are paſt, and the day of recompence and vengeance will begin. Now God tries us, and offers mercy to us; but if we obſtinately refuſe it, judgment will take hold of us.

And then we muſt limit the mercy of God to the conditions upon which he offers it, which are, repentance for ſins paſt, and ſincere obedience for the future: but if men continue obſtinate and impenitent, and encourage themſelves in ſin from the mercy and patience of God; this is not a caſe that admits of mercy, but, on the contrary, his juſtice will triumph in the ruin and deſtruction of thoſe who, inſtead of embracing the offers of his mercy, do deſpiſe and abuſe them: "He will laugh at their ca-"lamity, and mock when their fear comes; when "their fear comes as deſolation, and their deſtruc-"tion as a whirl-wind; when diſtreſs and anguiſh "cometh upon them, then they may call upon him, "but he will not anſwer; they may ſeek him ear-"ly, but they ſhall not find him. If we deſpiſe "the riches of God's goodneſs, and long-ſuffering, "and forbearance," he knows how to handle us, and will do it to purpoſe; "with the froward he "will ſhew himſelf froward," and will be in a more eſpecial manner ſevere towards thoſe who take encouragement from his mercy, to diſbelieve and deſpiſe his threatenings. And this God hath as plainly told us, as words can expreſs any thing, Deut. xxix. 19, 20. "And if it come to paſs that when he "heareth the words of this curſe, he bleſs himſelf "in his heart, ſaying, I ſhall have peace, though I "walk in the imagination of my heart, to add drun-"kenneſs to thirſt: the Lord will not ſpare him, "but then the anger of the Lord, and his jealouſy, "ſhall ſmoke againſt that man, and all the curſes

"that

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" that are written in this book, ſhall lie upon him, " and the LORD ſhall blot out his name from under " heaven." Whatever right and power GOD hath reſerved to himſelf about the execution of his threatenings, he hath plainly declared, that, of all others, thoſe who encourage themſelves in a ſinful courſe, from the hopes of GOD's mercy, notwithſtanding his threatenings, ſhall find no favour and mercy at his hand: whatever he may remit of his threatenings to others, he will certainly not ſpare thoſe who believe ſo largely concerning the mercy of GOD, not with a mind to ſubmit to the terms of it, but to preſume ſo much the more upon it.

(4.) GOD hath not been wanting to ſhew ſome remarkable inſtances of his ſeverity towards ſinners in this world. As he is pleaſed ſometimes to give good men ſome fore-taſtes of heaven, and earneſts of their future happineſs; ſo likewiſe by ſome preſent ſtroke, to let ſinners feel what they are to expect hereafter, ſome ſparks of hell do now and then fall upon the conſciences of ſinners. That fear which is ſometimes kindled in men's conſciences in this life, that horrible anguiſh, and thoſe unſpeakable terrors which ſome ſinners have had experience of in this world, may ſerve to forewarn us of " the wrath which is to " come," and to convince us of the reality of thoſe expreſſions of the torments of hell, by " the worm " that dies not, and the fire that is not quenched." That miraculous deluge, which ſwallowed up the old world, that hell which was rained down from heaven, in thoſe terrible ſhowers of fire and brimſtone, to conſume Sodom and Gomorrah; the earth opening her mouth upon Corah and his ſeditious company, to let them down, as it were, quick into hell: theſe and many other remarkable judgments of GOD, in ſeveral ages, upon particular perſons, and upon ci-

" meaſures of our ſins," he fills the " vi
" his wrath: Rom. ii. 5. and according to th
" and impenitent heart, treaſureſt up to thyſelf
" againſt the day of wrath, and the revela
" the righteous judgment of God." Go
keeps in his diſpleaſure: but all the while we
in an impenitent courſe, the wrath of God is
nually increaſing, and will at laſt be manife
the righteous judgment of God upon ſinners,
now exerciſeth and diſplayeth his milder att
his goodneſs, and mercy, and patience: bu
will not always hold out; there is a dreadfu
coming, wherein (as the apoſtle ſpeaks) G
" ſhew his wrath, and make his power k
after he hath " endured with much long-ſ
" the veſſels of wrath fitted for deſtruction.
this long time of God's patience and forb
" his wrath is kindling, and he is whetting
" tering ſword, and making ſharp his arrow
this long preparation doth portend a muc
dreadful execution: ſo that we ſhould reaſ

forſake their own mercies, the mercy of God in the next ſhould forſake them. SERM. CL.

4. Another falſe concluſion which men draw from the delay of puniſhment, is, that becauſe it is delayed, therefore it is not ſo certain: the ſinner eſcapes for the preſent; and though he have ſome miſgivings and fearful apprehenſions of the future, yet he hopes his fears may be greater than his danger.

It is true, indeed, we are not ſo certain of the miſery of wicked men in another world, as if it were preſent, and we lay groaning under the weight of it: ſuch a certainty as this would not only leave no place for doubting, but even for that which we properly and ſtrictly call faith; for "faith is the evidence of "things not ſeen." But ſure we have other faculties beſides ſenſe to judge of things by; we may be ſufficiently certain of many things which are neither preſent nor ſenſible, of many things paſt and future, upon good ground and teſtimony: we are ſure that we were born, and yet we have no remembrance of it; we are certain that we ſhall die, though we never had the experience of it. Things may be certain in their cauſes, as well as in their preſent exiſtence, if the cauſes be certain. The truth of God, who hath declared theſe things to us, is an abundant ground of aſſurance to us, though they be at a great diſtance: the certainty of things is not ſhaken by our wavering belief concerning them.

Beſides, the very light of nature, and the common reaſon of mankind, hath always made a contrary inference from the long-ſuffering of God, and the delay of preſent puniſhment. Though men are apt to think, that becauſe judgment is deferred, therefore it is not certain; yet the very light of nature hath taught men to reaſon otherwiſe; that becauſe God is ſo patient to ſinners in this life, therefore

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there will a time come when they ſhall be puniſhed; that becauſe this life is a time of trial and forbearance, therefore there ſhall be another ſtate after this life, which ſhall be a ſeaſon of recompence. And by this argument chiefly it was that the wiſeſt of the heathen ſatisfied themſelves concerning another ſtate after this life, and anſwered the troubleſome objection againſt the providence of God, from the unequal adminiſtration of things in this world, ſo viſible in the afflictions and ſufferings of good men, and the proſperity of the wicked; viz. That there would be another ſtate that would adjuſt all theſe matters, and ſet them ſtreight, when good and bad men ſhould receive the full recompence of their deeds.

The 5th and laſt falſe concluſion, which men draw from the long-ſuffering of God and the delay of puniſhment, is this: that it is, however, probably at ſome diſtance, and therefore they may ſin yet a while longer, and all this danger may be prevented time enough, by a future repentance in our old age, or at the hour of death; and they are confirmed very much in this hope, becauſe they ſee men much worſe than themſelves, great criminals and malefactors, upon two or three days warning, to perform this work of repentance very ſubſtantially, and to die with great comfort and aſſurance of their ſalvation. This is the moſt common deluſion of all the reſt, and hath been, I am afraid, the ruin of more ſouls than all the other which I have mentioned; they may have "ſlain their thouſands," but this "it's ten thouſands."

For anſwer to this, be pleaſed ſeriouſly to lay to heart theſe following conſiderations, moſt of which I ſhall ſpeak but briefly to, becauſe I have, upon other occaſions, ſpoken largely to them.

(1.) If there be a future judgment, then it is certain, at how great a diſtance ſoever it may be. That which

h ſhall be a thouſand years hence, will certainly SERM. CL.
and it is but very ſmall comfort and encourage-
:, conſidering the vaſt diſproportion between
and eternity, to think, that after twenty or forty
ı ſhall be paſt and gone, then muſt I enter upon
al miſery; then will thoſe intolerable torments
ı which ſhall never have an end.

.) But it is not certain that it is at ſuch a diſtance:
ı we "put from us the evil day," it is many
s nearer to us than we are aware; and when we
ς the judgment of GOD is at a great diſtance,
ıe judge" may be "near, even at the door."
times are not in our own hands, but we are per-
y at the diſpoſal of another, who when he pleaſ-
can put a period to them, and cauſe our breath
eaſe from our noſtrils, and we ſhall not be:
'here is no man hath power over the ſpirit, to
:tain the ſpirit; neither hath he power in the day
f death," ſaith the wiſe man a little before the
. Thou dreameſt, perhaps, of many years conti-
ıce in this world, and, perhaps, in the height of
vain imagination, "the decree is ſealed, and the
ommandment come forth" to ſummon thee out
his world, and thou art juſt dropping into that
:ry, which thou fancieſt to be at ſuch a diſtance;
lſt thou art vainly promiſing thyſelf "the eaſe
ıf many years," GOD may ſay to thee, "Thou
ool, this night ſhall thy ſoul be required of thee;"
then, where are all thy hopes?

3.) Suppoſing the evil day were at a conſiderable
ance, yet men run an infinite hazard in venturing
:he hopes of their ſalvation upon a future repen-
:e; for what knoweſt thou, O man! but thou
ſt be ſurprized by a ſudden ſtroke, which may
: thee no warning, leave thee no ſpace of repen-
:e? a violent diſeaſe may ſeize upon thee, which

may

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may diſorder thy underſtanding, and ſo weaken all thy faculties, as to render thee unfit for all reaſonable operations: at the beſt, how unfit are we for the moſt ſerious work of our lives, when we are hardly fit to do any thing? Old age is a very unſeaſonable time for repentance, when we are full of weakneſs and infirmity, and our minds are crooked and bowed down by vice, as our bodies are by age, and as hard to be recovered to their firſt ſtreightneſs; much more is it an improper time for this work, when ſickneſs and old age meet together. There are two things in which men, in other things wiſe enough, do uſually miſcarry; in putting off the making of their wills, and their repentance, till it be too late. Men had need then be of ſound underſtanding and perfect memory, when they ſet about matters of ſo great conſequence in reſpect to their temporal and eternal concernments: eſpecially when men have the happineſs of all eternity to take care of and provide for, they had need have their underſtandings about them, and all the advantages of leiſure and conſideration, to make a ſober reflection upon their paſt lives, and make up their accounts with God, and to ſet all things right between him and them; and it is well, if, after all, a repentance wilfully deferred ſo long, ſo ſhort and imperfect, ſo confuſed and huddled up, will at laſt be accepted as a tolerable atonement for the crimes and miſcarriages of a long life.

(4.) Suppoſe thou wert ſure to repent before thou leaveſt the world, and to do this work throughly, which no man can promiſe to himſelf that deliberately delays it; yet this can be no reaſonable encouragement to go on in an evil courſe, becauſe we do but hereby aggravate our own trouble, and treaſure up much more ſorrow and affliction to ourſelves againſt the day of repentance, and conſequently ſin on, in hopes

hopes of being hereafter ſo much the more troubled and grieved for what we have done; as if a man ſhould go on to break the laws, in hopes of a more ſevere and exemplary puniſhment: ſure this can be no encouragement or ground of hope to any reaſonable and conſiderate man. SERM. CL.

Laſtly, As to the encouragement which men take from the ſudden repentance of great criminals and malefactors, and their dying with ſo much comfort and aſſurance; if this be well conſidered, there is little comfort to be fetched from ſuch examples. For,

1ſt, Though a ſincere repentance in ſuch circumſtances be poſſible; yet it is almoſt impoſſible for the party himſelf concerned, much more for others, upon any good ground, to judge when it is ſincere. God, who knows the hearts of men, and whether, if they had lived longer, they would in the future courſe of their lives have juſtified and made good their repentance and good reſolutions, only knows the ſincerity of it.

But, 2dly, no certain judgment is to be made from the comfort and confidence of the party concerned; for the buſineſs is not, what comfort and confidence men have, but what ground they have for it: and whereas men are apt piouſly to ſuppoſe, that ſo extraordinary a comfort and aſſurance is wrought in them by the ſpirit of God, nothing is more uncertain; becauſe we ſometimes ſee thoſe who give no ſuch teſtimony of their repentance, to die with every whit as much courage, and comfort, and confident perſuaſion of their ſalvation, as thoſe that do. But this, certainly, is not from the ſpirit of God: a natural obſtinacy and courage may carry men a great way; and falſe and miſtaken principles may fill men for the preſent with as much comfort and confidence, as well grounded hopes. In the church

of

SERM. CL. of Rome, great numbers of thoſe who have led very wicked lives, after a formal confeſſion and abſolution, and ſome good words of encouragement from the prieſt, die as full of peace and comfort, to all appearance, as the beſt of men.

Indeed it is very natural to men, who find themſelves in a deſperate condition, to be ſtrangely elevated and raiſed, upon any hopes given of eſcaping ſo great a danger as they apprehend themſelves to be in; eſpecially if theſe hopes be given them by a grave man, of whoſe piety and judgment they have a venerable opinion. When men have the ſentence of death in themſelves, as all wicked livers muſt have, they are naturally apt to be overjoyed at the unexpected news of a pardon.

To ſpeak my mind freely in this matter, I have no great opinion of that extraordinary comfort and confidence which ſome have, upon a ſudden repentance for great and flagrant crimes, becauſe I cannot diſcern any ſufficient ground for it. I think great humility and dejection of mind, and a doubtful apprehenſion of their condition, next almoſt to deſpair of it, would much better become them; becauſe their caſe is really ſo very doubtful in itſelf. There is great reaſon for the repentance of ſuch perſons, and it becomes them well; but I ſee very little reaſon for their great comfort and confidence, nor does it become their circumſtances and condition. Let them exerciſe as deep a repentance as is poſſible, and "bring "forth all the fruits meet for it" that are poſſible in ſo ſhort a time; let them humble themſelves before GOD, and pray inceſſantly to him day and night for mercy; make all the reparation they can for the injuries they have done, by confeſſion and acknowledgment, and by making ſatisfaction to the parties injured, if it be in their power; by giving alms to

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the poor, by warning others, and endeavouring to reclaim them to a better mind and courſe of life; and for the reſt humbly commit themſelves to the mercy of GOD in JESUS CHRIST; let them imitate, as near as they can, the behaviour of the penitent thief, the only example the ſcripture has left us of a late repentance that proved effectual, who gave the greateſt teſtimony that could be of a penitent ſorrow for his ſins, and of his faith in the SAVIOUR of the world, by a generous and couragious owning of him in the midſt of his diſgrace and ſuffering, when even his own diſciples had denied and forſaken him: but we do not find in him any ſigns of extraordinary comfort, much leſs of confidence; but he humbly commended himſelf to the mercy and goodneſs of his SAVIOUR, ſaying, "Lord, remember me, when "thou comeſt into thy kingdom." SERM. CL.

SERMON CLI.

The long-ſuffering of GOD.

ECCLES. viii. 11.

Becauſe ſentence againſt an evil work is not executed ſpeedily, therefore the heart of the ſons of men is fully ſet in them to do evil.

I HAVE conſidered how apt men are to abuſe the long-ſuffering of GOD, to the hardening and encouraging of themſelves in ſin, and whence this comes to paſs; where I conſidered the ſeveral falſe concluſions which ſinners draw from the delay of puniſh- SERM. CLI.

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puniſhment, as if there were no GOD, or providence, or difference of good and evil; or elſe, as is more commonly pretended, that ſin is not ſo great an evil, and that GOD is not ſo highly offended at it, or that GOD is not ſo ſevere as he is repreſented; that the puniſhment of ſin is not ſo certain, or however, it is at a diſtance, and may be prevented by a future repentance: all which I have ſpoken fully to, and endeavoured to ſhew the fallacy and unreaſonableneſs of them. I ſhall now proceed to the

Third and laſt thing I propounded, which was, to anſwer an objection to which this diſcourſe may ſeem liable; and that is this: If the long-ſuffering of GOD be the occaſion of men's hardneſs and impenitency, then why is GOD ſo patient to ſinners, when they are ſo prone to abuſe his goodneſs and patience? and how is it goodneſs in GOD to forbear ſinners ſo long, when this forbearance of his is ſo apt to miniſter to them an occaſion of their farther miſchief and greater ruin? It ſhould ſeem, according to this, that it would be much greater mercy to the greateſt part of ſinners, not to be patient toward them at all; but inſtantly upon the firſt occaſion and provocation, to cut them off, and ſo to put a ſtop to their wickedneſs, and to hinder them from making themſelves more miſerable, by increaſing their guilt, and "treaſuring up wrath to themſelves againſt the "day of wrath."

This is the objection; and becauſe it ſeems to be of ſome weight, I ſhall endeavour to return a ſatisfactory anſwer to it in theſe following particulars. And,

I. I aſk the ſinner if he will ſtand to this? Art thou ſerious, and wouldſt thou in good earneſt have GOD to deal thus with thee, to take the very firſt advantage to deſtroy thee or turn thee into hell, and to make thee miſerable beyond all hopes of recovery?

Conſider

nſider of it again. Doſt thou think it deſirable, that SERM. CLI.
od ſhould deal thus with thee, and let fly his judg-
nts upon thee ſo ſoon as ever thou haſt ſinned?
not, why do men trifle, and make an objection
ainſt the long-ſuffering of God, which they would
very loth ſhould be made good upon them?

II. It is likewiſe to be conſidered, that the long-
ffering of God towards ſinners is not a total for-
arance: it is uſually ſo mixt with afflictions and
dgments of one kind or other, upon ourſelves or
hers, as to be a ſufficient warning to us, if we
ould conſider and lay it to heart, to "ſin no more,
leſt a worſe thing come upon us;" leſt that judg-
ent, which we ſaw inflicted upon others, come
ome to us. And is not this great goodneſs, to
arn us when he might deſtroy us, to leave room
r a retreat, when he might put our caſe paſt re-
edy?

All this time of God's patience, he threatens ſin-
ers, to awaken them out of their ſecurity; he pu-
iſheth them gently, that we may have no ground
o hope for impunity; he makes examples of ſome
n a more ſevere and remarkable manner, that others
nay hear, and fear, and be afraid to commit the
ike ſins, leſt the like puniſhment overtakes them;
he whips ſome offenders before our eyes, to ſhew us
what ſin deſerves, and what we alſo may juſtly ex-
pect, if we do the ſame thing; and will nothing be
a warning to us but our own ſufferings!

Nay, God doth uſually ſend ſome judgment or
other upon every ſinner in this life; he lets him feel
the rod, that he may know that it is "an evil and
"bitter thing to ſin againſt him." He exerciſeth
men with many afflictions and croſſes, and diſap-
pointments, which their own conſciences tell them
are the juſt recompences of their deeds; and by theſe

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lighter ſtrokes, he gives us a merciful warning to avoid his heavier blows; when mercy alone will not work upon us and win us, but being fed to the full, we grow wanton and fooliſh, he adminiſters phyſick to us by affliction, and by adverſity endeavours to bring us to conſideration and a ſober mind; and many have been cured this way, and the judgments of God have done them that good, which his mercies and bleſſings could not; for God would ſave us any way, by his mercy or by his judgment, by ſickneſs or by health, by plenty or by want, by what we deſire, or by what we dread; ſo deſirous is he of our repentance and happineſs, that he leaves no method unattempted that may probably do us good; he ſtrikes upon every paſſion in the heart of man; he works upon our love by his goodneſs, upon our hopes by his promiſes, and upon our fears, firſt by his threatnings, and if they be not effectual, then by his judgments; he tries every affection and takes hold of it, if by any means he may draw us to himſelf; and will nothing warn us, but what will ruin us, and render our caſe deſperate and paſt hope?

And if any ſinner be free from outward afflictions and ſufferings, yet ſin never fails to carry it's own puniſhment along with it; there is a ſecret ſting and worm, a divine Nemeſis and revenge, that is bred in the bowels of every ſin, and makes it a heavy puniſhment to itſelf; the conſcience of a ſinner doth frequently torment him, and his guilt haunts and dogs him wherever he goes; for whenever a man commits a known and wilful ſin, he drinks down poiſon, which though it may work ſlowly, yet it will give him many a gripe, and, if no means be uſed to expel it, will deſtroy him at laſt.

So that the long-ſuffering of God is wiſely order-

ed,

, and there is ſuch a mixture of judgments in it' SERM. CLI.
is ſufficient to awaken ſinners, and much more apt
deter them from ſin, than to encourage them to
on and continue in it.

III. Nothing is farther from the intention of God,
ın to harden men by his long-ſuffering. This the
ipture moſt expreſly declares, 2 Pet. iii. 9. "He
is long-ſuffering to us-ward, not willing that any
ſhould periſh, but that all ſhould come to repent-
ance." He hath a very gracious and merciful
ſign in his patience towards ſinners, and is there-
e good, that he may make us ſo, and that we
ıy ceaſe to do evil. The event of God's long-
fering may, by our own fault and abuſe of it,
ove our ruin; but the deſign and intention of
is our repentance. "He winks at the ſins of
men" (ſaith the ſon of Syrach) "that they may
repent." He paſſeth them by, and does not
ce ſpeedy vengeance upon ſinners for them, that
ey may have time to repent of them, and to make
eir peace with him, while they are yet in the way.
Nay, his long-ſuffering doth not only give ſpace
repentance, but is a great argument and encou-
gement to it. That he is ſo loth to ſurprize ſin-
rs, that he gives them the liberty of ſecond
oughts, time to reflect upon themſelves, to conſi-
r what they have done, and to retract it by re-
ntance, is a ſufficient intimation that he hath no
nd to ruin us, that "he deſires not the death of
a ſinner, but rather that he ſhould turn from his
wickedneſs and live." And ſhould not this good-
ſs of his make us ſorry that we have offended him?
th it not naturally lead and invite us to repentance?
ıat other interpretation can we make of his patience,
ıat other uſe in reaſon ſhould we make of it, but
repent and return, that we may be ſaved?

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IV. There is nothing in the long-ſuffering of GOD, that is in truth any ground of encouragement to men in an evil courſe; the proper and natural tendency of GOD's goodneſs is to lead men to repentance, and by repentance to bring them to happineſs; Rom. ii. 4. "Deſpiſeſt thou the riches of "his goodneſs and patience, and long-ſuffering, not "knowing that the goodneſs of GOD leadeth thee "to repentance?" This St. Peter, with relation to theſe very words of St. Paul, interprets, "leading "to ſalvation;" 2 Pet. iii. 15. "And account that "the long-ſuffering of our LORD is ſalvation, as "our beloved brother Paul alſo hath written un-"to you." Now where did St. Paul write ſo, unleſs in this text; "not knowing that the goodneſs "of GOD leads to repentance?" It is not only great ignorance, and a very groſs miſtake, to think that it is the deſign and intention of GOD's patience and long-ſuffering to encourage men in ſin; but likewiſe to think, that in the nature of the thing, goodneſs can have any tendency to make men evil; "not knowing that the goodneſs of GOD leads to "repentance."

V. That through the long-ſuffering of GOD, ſinners are hardened in their evil ways, is wholly to be aſcribed to their abuſe of GOD's goodneſs; it is neither the end and intention, nor the proper and natural effect of the thing, but the accidental event of it, through our own fault. And is this any real objection againſt the long-ſuffering of GOD? May not GOD be patient, though ſinners be impenitent? May not he be good, though we be ſo fooliſh as to make an ill uſe of his goodneſs? Becauſe men are apt to abuſe the mercies and favours of GOD, is it therefore a fault in him to beſtow them upon us? Is it not enough for us to abuſe them, but will we challeng

lenge God alſo of unkindneſs in giving them? May not God uſe wiſe and fitting means for our recovery, becauſe we are ſo fooliſh as not to make a wiſe uſe of them? And muſt he be charged with our ruin, becauſe he ſeeks by all means to prevent it? Is it not enough to be injurious to ourſelves, but will we be unthankful to God alſo? When God hath laid out the riches of his goodneſs and patience upon ſinners, will they challenge him as acceſſory to their ruin? As if a fooliſh heir, that hath prodigally waſted the fair eſtate that was left him, ſhould be ſo far from blaming himſelf as to charge his father with undoing him. Are theſe the beſt returns which the infinite mercy and patience of God hath deſerved from us? Do we thus requite the Lord, fooliſh people and unwiſe!

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God's patience would ſave ſinners, but they ruin themſelves by their abuſe of it: let the blame then lye where it is due, and let God have the glory of his goodneſs, though men refuſe the benefit and advantage of it.

VI. and laſtly, But becauſe this objection pincheth hardeſt in one point; viz. That God certainly foreſees that a great many will abuſe his long-ſuffering, to the encreaſing of their guilt, and the aggravating of their condemnation; and how is his long-ſuffering any mercy and goodneſs to thoſe, who he certainly fore-knows will in the event be ſo much the more miſerable, for having had ſo much patience extended to them? Therefore for a full anſwer, I deſire theſe ſix things may be conſidered.

1. That God deſigns this life for the trial of our obedience, that according as we behave ourſelves, he may reward or puniſh us in another world.

2. That there could be no trial of obedience, nor any capacity of rewards and puniſhments, but upon the ſuppoſition of freedom and liberty; that is,

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3. That God, by virtue of the infinite perfection of his knowledge, does clearly and certainly foreſee all future events, even thoſe which are moſt contingent, ſuch as are the arbitrary actions of free and voluntary agents. This I know hath been denied, but without reaſon; ſince it is not only contrary to the common apprehenſions of mankind from the very light of nature, that God ſhould not fore-know future events, but to clear and expreſs ſcripture; and that in ſuch inſtances, for the ſake of which they deny God's foreknowledge in general of the future actions of free and voluntary agents, I mean, that the ſcripture expreſly declares God's determinate foreknowledge of the moſt wicked actions; as the crucifying of Christ, who is ſaid, "according to the "determinate counſel and fore-knowledge of God," to have been "by wicked hands crucified and ſlain."

4. That the bare fore-knowledge of things future hath no more influence upon them to make them to be, than the ſight and knowledge of things preſent hath upon them to make them to be preſent. I may ſee or know that the ſun is riſen, without being the cauſe of it's riſing; and no more is bare knowledge of future events the cauſe that they are, when they are. And if any man aſk, how God can certainly fore-know things, which depend upon free and arbitrary cauſes, unleſs he do ſome way decree and determine them? I anſwer, that this is not a fair and reaſonable demand, to aſk of men, who have but finite underſtandings, to make out and declare all the ways that infinite knowledge hath of knowing and of fore-ſeeing the actions of free creatures, without prejudice to their liberty and freedom of acting. However, it is of the two much more credible

dible to reaſon, that infinite knowledge ſhould cer- SERM. CLI.
tainly fore-know things, which our underſtandings cannot imagine how they ſhould be fore-known, than that God ſhould any ways be the author of ſin, by determining and decreeing the wicked actions of men. The firſt only argues the imperfection of our underſtanding; but the other lays the greateſt blemiſh and imperfection that can be upon the divine nature.

So that this difficult controverſy about the fore-knowledge of God is brought to this point, whether a man had better believe, that infinite knowledge may be able to fore-know things in a way which our finite underſtanding cannot comprehend; or to aſcribe ſomething to God, from whence it would unavoidably follow, that he is the author of ſin. The firſt is only a modeſt and juſt acknowledgment of our own ignorance; the laſt is the utmoſt and greateſt abſurdity that a man can be brought to; and to ſay that we cannot believe the fore-knowledge of God, unleſs we can make out the particular manner of it, is more unreaſonable, than if an ignorant man ſhould deny a difficult propoſition in Euclid or Archimedes to be demonſtrated, becauſe he knows not how to demonſtrate it.

5. And conſequently fore-knowledge and liberty may very well conſiſt; and notwithſtanding God's fore-knowledge of what men will do, they may be as free as if he did not fore-know it. And,

Laſtly, That God doth not deal with men according to his fore-knowledge of the good or bad uſe of their liberty, but according to the nature and reaſon of things; and therefore if he be long-ſuffering toward ſinners, and do not cut them off upon the firſt provocation, but give them a ſpace and opportunity of repentance, and uſe all proper means

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and arguments to bring them to repentance, and be ready to afford his grace to excite good reſolutions in them, and to ſecond and aſſiſt them, and they refuſe and reſiſt all this; their wilful obſtinacy and impenitency is as culpable, and GOD's goodneſs and patience as much to be acknowledged, as if GOD did not foreſee the abuſe of it; becauſe his foreſight and knowledge of what they would do, laid no neceſſity upon them to do what they did.

If a prince had the privilege of fore-knowledge as GOD hath, and did certainly foreſee, that a great many of his ſubjects would certainly incur the penalty of his laws, and that others would abuſe his goodneſs and clemency to them; yet if he would govern them like free and reaſonable creatures, he ought to make the ſame wiſe laws to reſtrain their exorbitancy, and to uſe the ſame clemency in all caſes that did fairly admit of it, as if he did not at all foreſee what they would do, nor how they would abuſe his clemency; for it is nevertheleſs fit to make wiſe and reaſonable laws, and to govern with equity and clemency, though it were certainly foreſeen that they that are governed would act very fooliſhly and unreaſonably in the uſe of their liberty. It is great goodneſs in GOD to give men the means and opportunity of being ſaved, though they abuſe his goodneſs to their farther ruin; and he may be heartily grieved for that folly and obſtinacy in men, which he certainly foreſees will end in their ruin; and may with great ſerioufneſs and ſincerity wiſh they would do otherwiſe, and were as wiſe to do good, as they are wilful to do evil. And thus he is repreſented in ſcripture, as regretting the miſchief which men wilfully bring upon themſelves; "O that they were "wiſe, O that they would underſtand, and conſi"der their latter end!"

And

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And this is ſufficient to vindicate the goodneſs of God in his patience and long-ſuffering to ſinners, and to make them wholly guilty of all that befals them for their wilful contempt and abuſe of it.

I ſhall draw ſome inferences from this whole diſcourſe upon this argument.

I. This ſhews the unreaſonableneſs and perverſe diſingenuity of men, who take occaſion to harden and encourage themſelves in ſin from the long-ſuffering of God, which above all things in the world ſhould melt and ſoften them. Thou haſt ſinned, and art liable to the juſtice of God; ſentence is gone forth, but God reſpites the execution of it, and hath granted thee a reprieve, and time and opportunity to ſue out thy pardon. Now what uſe ought we in reaſon to make of this patience of God towards us? We ought certainly "to break off our ſins by a ſpeedy repentance, leſt "iniquity be our ruin;" immediately to ſue out our pardon, and "to make our peace with God, while "we are yet in the way," and to reſolve, never any more willingly to offend that God who is ſo gracious and merciful, ſo long-ſuffering and full of compaſſion. But what uſe do men commonly make of it? They take occaſion to confirm and ſtrengthen themſelves in their wickedneſs, and to reaſon themſelves into vain and groundleſs hopes of impunity. Now what a folly is this, becauſe puniſhment doth not come, therefore to haſten it, and to draw it down upon ourſelves? Becauſe it hath not yet overtaken us, therefore to go forth and meet it? Becauſe there is yet a poſſibility of eſcaping it, therefore to take a certain courſe to make it unavoidable? Becauſe there is yet hope concerning us, therefore to make our caſe deſperate and paſt remedy? See how unreaſonably men bring ruin upon themſelves; ſo that well might the Pſalmiſt aſk that queſtion, "Have all the workers of iniquity no "knowledge?"

But

SERM. CLI. But their folly and unreaſonableneſs is not ſo great, but their perverſeneſs and diſingenuity is greater. To ſin, becauſe GOD is long-ſuffering, is to be evil, becauſe he is good, and to provoke him, becauſe he ſpares us; it is to ſtrive with GOD, and to contend with his goodneſs, as if we were reſolved to try the utmoſt length of his patience; and becauſe GOD is loth to puniſh, therefore to urge and importune him to that which is ſo contrary to his inclination.

II. This may ſerve to convince men of the great evil and danger of thus abuſing the long-ſuffering of GOD. It is a provocation of the higheſt nature, becauſe it is to trample upon his deareſt attributes, thoſe which he moſt delights and glories in, his goodneſs and mercy; for the long-ſuffering of GOD is his goodneſs to the guilty, and his mercy to thoſe who deſerve to be miſerable.

Nothing makes our ruin more certain, more ſpeedy, and more intolerable, than the abuſe of GOD's goodneſs and patience. After GOD had born long with that rebellious people, the children of Iſrael, and notwithſtanding all their murmurings, all their infidelity and impenitency, had ſpared them ten times, at laſt he ſets his ſeal to their ruin, Heb. iii. 8, 9. "Harden not your hearts, as in the provo-"cation, in the day of temptation in the wilderneſs: "when your fathers proved me, and ſaw my works, "forty years." This was a high provocation indeed to harden their hearts under the patience and long-ſuffering of GOD, after forty years trial and experience of it; v. 10. "Wherefore I was grieved "with that generation, and ſaid, They are a people "that do err in their hearts, for they have not known "my ways." And what was the iſſue of all this? Upon this GOD takes up a fixed reſolution to bear no longer with them, but to cut them off from the bleſ-

ſings

ngs he had promiſed to beſtow upon them; "He SERM. CLI.
ſware in his wrath, that they ſhould not enter in-
to his reſt. To whom ſware he, that they ſhould
not enter into his reſt, but to them that believed
not?" Or, as the word may be rendered, "to
them that were diſobedient?" that is, to them who
vent on in their rebellion againſt him, after he had
uffered their manners forty years.

And as the abuſe of God's patience renders our leſtruction more certain, ſo more ſpeedy and more ntolerable. We think that becauſe God ſuffers long, he will ſuffer always; and becauſe puniſhment is de-ayed, therefore it will never come; but it will come he ſooner for this: ſo our Lord tells us, Luke xii. When "the ſervant ſaid, His Lord delayed his "coming; the Lord of that ſervant ſhall come "in a day that he looks not for him, and at an hour "when he is not aware, and ſhall cut him in ſunder, "and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites." None ſo like to be ſurpriſed by the judgment of God, as thoſe who treſpaſs ſo boldly upon his patience.

III. To perſuade us to make a right uſe of the patience and long-ſuffering of God, and to comply with the merciful end and deſign of God therein.

1. It is the deſign of God's long-ſuffering, to give us a ſpace of repentance. Were it not that God had this deſign and reaſonable expectation from us, he would not reprieve a ſinner for one moment, but would execute his judgments upon him ſo ſoon as ever he had offended: this our Saviour declares to us by the parable of the fig-tree, Luke xiii. 6. Were it not that God expects from us the fruit of repentance, he would "cut us down", and not ſuffer us "to cumber the ground": after he had "waited "three years, ſeeking fruit and finding none, he ſpares "it one year more, to ſee if it would bear fruit."

2. The

SERM. CLI.

2. The long-ſuffering of GOD is a great encouragement to repentance. We ſee by his patience that he is not ready to take advantage againſt us; that he ſpares us when we offend, is a very good ſign that he will forgive us if we repent. Thus natural light would reaſon, and ſo the king of Nineveh, a heathen, reaſons, "Who can tell if GOD will turn and "repent?" But we are fully aſſured of this by the gracious declarations of the goſpel, and the way of pardon and forgiveneſs which is therein eſtabliſhed through faith in the blood of JESUS CHRIST, who was made "a propitiation for the ſins of the whole world."

Therefore the long-ſuffering of GOD ſhould be a powerful argument to us "to break off our ſins by "repentance:" for this is the end of GOD's patience; "He is long-ſuffering to us-ward, not willing "that any ſhould periſh, but that all ſhould come "to repentance. He hath no pleaſure in the death "of the wicked, but that the wicked ſhould turn "from his way and live." GOD every where expreſſeth a vehement deſire and earneſt expectation of our repentance and converſion; Jer. iv. 14. "O "Jeruſalem! waſh thy heart from wickedneſs, that "thou mayeſt be ſaved." And chap. xiii. 27. "Wo unto thee, Jeruſalem! wilt thou be made "clean? when ſhall it once be?" He who is ſo patient as to the puniſhment of our ſins, is almoſt impatient of our repentance for them; "Wilt thou "be made clean? when ſhall it once be?" And can we ſtand out againſt his earneſt deſire of our happineſs, whom we have ſo often and ſo long provoked to make us miſerable?

Let us then return into ourſelves, and think ſeriouſly what our caſe and condition is; how we have lived, and how long the patience of GOD hath ſuffered our manners, and waited for our repentance,

and

and how inevitable and intolerable the miſery of thoſe must be who live and die in the contempt and abuſe of it; let us heartily repent of our wicked lives, and ſay, "What have we done?" How careleſs have we been of our own happineſs, and what pains have we taken to undo ourſelves? SERM. CLI.

Let us ſpeedily ſet about this work, becauſe we do not know how long the patience of God may laſt, and the opportunities of our ſalvation be continued to us. This day of God's grace and patience will have an end; therefore, as the prophet exhorts, Iſa. lv. 6. "Seek the Lord while he may be found, and call "upon him while he is near." Now God graciouſly invites ſinners to come to him, and is ready to receive them; nay, if they do but move towards him, he is ready to go forth and meet them half way; but the time will come, when he will bid them depart from him; when they ſhall cry, "Lord, "Lord, open unto us," and the door of mercy ſhall be ſhut againſt them.

All the while thou delayeſt this neceſſary work, thou ventureſt thy immortal ſoul, and putteſt thy eternal ſalvation upon a deſperate hazard; and ſhould God ſnatch thee ſuddenly away in an impenitent ſtate, what would become of thee? Thou art yet in the way, and God is yet reconcileable, but death is not far off, and perhaps much nearer to thee than thou art aware; at the beſt thy life is uncertain, and death will infallibly put a period to this day of God's grace and patience.

Repentance is a work ſo neceſſary, that methinks no man ſhould loſe ſo much time as to deliberate, whether he ſhould ſet about it or not; *de neceſſariis nulla eſt deliberatio*; "no man deliberates about what "he muſt do, or be undone if he do it not." It is a work of ſo great conſequence and concernment, and

the

SER M. CLI. the delay of it ſo infinitely dangerous, that one would think no wiſe man could entertain a thought of deferring it. What greater folly and ſtupidity can there be, than for men to venture their immortal ſouls, and to run an apparent hazard in matters of everlaſting conſequence?

This day of GOD's patience is the great opportunity of our ſalvation, and if we let it ſlip, it is never to be recovered: if we miſ-improve this time of our life, we ſhall not be permitted to live it over again to improve it better. Our ſtate of trial ends with this life; after that GOD will prove us no more; then we ſhall wiſh, "O that I had known in that my day, "the things which belonged to my peace! but now "they are hid from mine eyes; therefore to day, "whilſt it is called to day, harden not your hearts, "make no tarrying to turn to the LORD, and put "not off from day to day; for ſuddenly ſhall the "wrath of the LORD break forth, and in thy ſe-"curity thou ſhalt be deſtroyed; exerciſe repent-"ance in the time of health, and defer not till death "to be juſtified."

SERMON CLII.

The power of GOD.

PSAL. LXII. 11.

GOD *hath ſpoken once; twice have I heard this, that power belongeth unto* GOD.

SERM. CLII. IN treating of the attributes of GOD, I have conſidered thoſe which relate to the divine underſtanding, to which I referred his knowledge and wiſ-

dom; thoſe alſo which relate to the divine will; viz. God's juſtice, truth, holineſs, and goodneſs: I come now to conſider his power of acting, which is his omnipotency; this I ſhall ſpeak to from theſe words. SERM. CLII.

In the beginning of this Pſalm, David declares that God was the great object of his truſt and confidence, and that all his hopes and expectation of ſafety and deliverance were from him, v. 1, 2. And this makes him challenge his enemies for all their miſchievous qualities and devices againſt him, as vain attempts, v. 3, 4. Hereupon he chargeth himſelf to continue his truſt and confidence in God, from whom was all his expectation, and who was able to ſave and deliver him; v. 5, 6, 7. And from his example and experience, he encourageth and exhorts all others to truſt in God, v. 8. and that from two arguments.

1. Becauſe all other objects of our truſt and confidence are vain and inſufficient, and will fail thoſe that rely upon them. If we will rely upon any thing in this world, it muſt either be perſons or things; but we cannot ſafely repoſe our truſt in either of theſe. Not in perſons: they may be reduced to one of theſe two heads, either high or low: Thoſe that are of a mean condition, it would be in vain to truſt them; they that cannot ſecure themſelves from meanneſs, cannot ſecure others from miſchief, "men of low degree "are vanity:" But the great ones of the world, they would ſeem to promiſe ſomething of aſſiſtance and ſecurity to us; but if we depend upon them, they will fruſtrate us, "men of high degree are a lie." As for the things of the world, that which men uſually place their confidence in, is riches; theſe are either got by unlawful, or lawful means; if they be ill gotten, by oppreſſion or robbery, they will be ſo far from ſecuring us from evil, that they will bring it upon us; if they be well gotten, they are of an uncertain nature,

that

SERM. CLII.

that we have little reaſon to place our hopes in them; "if riches increaſe, ſet not your heart upon them;" that is, your hope; for heart in ſcripture ſignifies any of the affections.

2. Becauſe GOD is the proper object of our truſt and confidence. We may ſafely rely upon any one, in whom theſe two things concur, a power to help us, and goodneſs to incline him ſo to do. Now David tells us, that both theſe are eminently in GOD, and do in a peculiar manner belong to him; power, v. 11. and goodneſs, v. 12.

I ſhall ſpeak to that which David makes the firſt ground of our confidence, the power of GOD; power belongs to GOD: For which he brings the teſtimony of GOD himſelf, "once hath GOD ſpoken, "yea twice have I heard this." Some interpreters trouble themſelves about the meaning of this expreſſion, as if it did refer to ſome particular revelation of GOD; and then again they are troubled how to reconcile GOD's ſpeaking this but once, with David's hearing it twice: but I do not love to ſpy myſteries in thoſe expreſſions which are capable of a plain ſenſe; for I underſtand no more by it but this, that GOD hath ſeveral times revealed this; he frequently declared himſelf by this attribute, "once, "yea twice," that is, he hath ſpoken it often, and David had heard it often. This is anſwerable to that phraſe of the Latins, *Semel atque iterum*; and it is uſual in all writers to uſe a certain number for an uncertain, and particularly among poets, *Felices ter & amplius*, Hor. And ſo in the poetical writers of ſcripture, Job v. 19. he hath "delivered thee in "ſix troubles, yea, in ſeven there ſhall no evil "touch thee;" that is, in ſeveral and various troubles. Eccleſ. xi. 2. "Give a portion to ſeven, and "alſo to eight;" that is, diſtribute thy charity to

many; and which is neareſt to this, Job xl. 5. SERM. CLII.
"Once have I ſpoken, but I will not anſwer; yea "twice, but I will proceed no farther:" that is, I have had ſeveral diſcourſes with my friends; and xxxiii. 14. "GOD ſpeaketh once, yea twice, in a dream, in "a viſion of the night;" that is, GOD reveals himſelf in ſeveral ways and manners to men; ſo here "GOD hath ſpoken once, yea twice;" that is, GOD hath often declared this. And if I would be ſo curious to refer to a particular declaration of GOD, I ſhould think, that it related either to the preface to the law, "I am the LORD thy GOD," that is, the great and powerful GOD, "that brought thee out of "the land of Egypt;" or rather to the declaration which GOD made of himſelf to Abraham, Iſaac, and Jacob, by the name of the Almighty GOD, Gen. xvii. 1. Concerning which revelation of GOD, it is ſaid expreſly, Exod. vi. 3. "I appeared unto Abraham, "and Iſaac, and Jacob, by the name of GOD Al-"mighty, but by my name Jehovah, was I not "known to them."

But that which I deſign to ſpeak to, is the propoſition itſelf, that "power belongs to GOD;" that is, that the excellency of power, power in it's higheſt degree and perfection; "all power belongs to GOD," that is, that omnipotence is a property or perfection of the divine nature.

In the handling of this, I ſhall ſhew,

Firſt, What we are to underſtand by the omnipotence of GOD.

Secondly, That this perfection belongs to GOD.

Firſt, What we are to underſtand by the omnipotence of GOD. And this I ſhall conſider,

I. As to the principle. And,

II. As to the exerciſe of it.

I. As to the principle, it is an ability to do all things,

SERM. CLII.

things, the doing of which ſpeaks power and perfection; that is, whatever is not repugnant either to the nature of things, or of GOD; whatever does not imply a contradiction in the thing, or an imperfection in the doer; an ability to do all things which are conſiſtent with itſelf, and with the divine nature and perfection; by which we muſt mean an executive power, the effect whereof is without himſelf; for what he is ſaid to do within himſelf, the acts of his underſtanding and will, as we conceive his will to be diſtinct from his power, are not to be referred to his omnipotence. To have a right conception of omnipotence we muſt imagine the moſt perfect active principle that we can, and it is ſtill ſomething more perfect than that, or any thing we can imagine. To help our conception,

1. Let us imagine a principle from which all other power is derived, and upon which it depends, and to which it is perfectly ſubject and ſubordinate.

2. A perfect active principle, which can do, not only what any finite being or creature can do, but what all beings joined together can do; nay, more and greater things than they all can do.

3. A perfect active principle, to which nothing can make any conſiderable, much leſs effectual reſiſtance, which can check and countermand at pleaſure, and carry down before it, and annihilate all other powers that we can imagine beſides this; becauſe we cannot imagine any other power, that is not derived from this, and does not depend upon it.

4. A perfect active principle, which can do all things in a moſt perfect manner, and can do all things at once and in an inſtant, and that with eaſe. We can but do one thing at once; and the greater and more conſiderable it is, the more time it will take us to do it, and we find it the harder and more difficult to be done:

one; but God, to whose knowledge all things are present at once, and together, and the acts of whose will are as quick and perfect as of his understanding, with a power answerable to the perfection of both; and therefore it is as easy to him to do all things, as one thing; at once, as successively, and in time. For this is the privilege of an infinite spirit, that it does not only act without hands and material engines or instruments, as every spirit doth, but without motion from one place to another, because he is every where, and fills all places; he acts *per modum voluntis*, as if his actings were nothing else but a willing that such a thing be done, and *ipso facto* every thing is so, as he wills it should be, and when he wills it should be; as if things did start up into being, or vanish out of being, as if they did break forth into being, and sculk again into nothing, and undergo such and such changes, *ad nutum voluntatis*, "at the beck of his will." And this is the most perfect way of acting that can be imagined, which the scripture seems to express to us when it represents God to "making things by his word, upholding all things by the word of his power," as if he did but "speak the word," and say, "Let such a thing be, and it was so;" as if there were nothing more required to the doing of any thing, but an express act of the divine will, which is all we can understand by God's speaking, by his word, and voice, and saying, "Let things be;" but the least that it can signify, is the quick and speedy manner of working, whereby God is able to do things in an instant, as soon as a word can be spoken.

SERM. CLII.

And as he can do all things at once, and in an instant; so with ease, without any pain or laborious endeavour; for what is it that can object any difficulty to him? At the first creation of things there was

SERM. CLII.

nothing to reſiſt him; and ſince the creation, there is nothing but what was made by him, and conſequently all whoſe power is derived from him, and depends upon him, and is ſubject to him, and being finite and limited, is infinitely unequal to the infinite power of GOD; ſo that we may imagine the divine power would paſs through all the reſiſtance that all created power can make, and all the difficulties it can object to it, with more eaſe than a bullet paſſeth through the thin air; or a man would paſs through a net of cobweb.

5. The moſt perfect active principle we can imagine, the utmoſt bounds and limits of whoſe perfection we cannot imagine, that is, when we have imagined it to be as perfect, and to act in as perfect a manner as we can imagine, yet we have not reached the perfection of it; but after all this, that it can do many things more than we can imagine, and in a manner much more perfect than we can imagine. This is the omnipotence of GOD as to the principle, which hath no bounds and limits. And,

II. As to the exerciſe of it, it is only limited by the divine will and wiſdom. The divine will determines it to its exerciſe, the divine wiſdom directs, and regulates the exerciſe of it; that is, GOD exerciſeth his power willingly, and not by neceſſity, and in ſuch manner, for the producing ſuch effects, and in order to ſuch ends and purpoſes, as ſeem beſt to his wiſdom. Hence he is ſaid "to act all things "according to his good pleaſure," and "accord-"ing to the counſel of his will," that is, freely and wiſely.

As to the extent of this power, I ſaid it was an ability to do all things that are conſiſtent with itſelf, and with the nature and perfection of GOD.

Firſt, that are conſiſtent with itſelf, that is, with

o do all things. It is a contradiction to SERM. CLII.
that omnipotence can do that, which, if it
done, would render all power inſignificant.
s account, the divine power is not ſaid to
the working of any thing which implies a
ion, and the terms whereof ſpeak a repug-
one another, and mutually deſtroy one ano-
the doing whereof is contrary to the na-
e thing which is ſuppoſed to be done, that
ſenſe, and cannot be imagined to be. For
that a thing ſhould be, and not be at the
. For a power to make a thing to be, ſo
ld not be while it is, ſignifies nothing; be-
h a being as is not, is nothing; and to
h a being, would be to do nothing; and
ıtly ſuch a power would ſignify nothing.
ſe we cannot ſay, that the divine power can
ıt the ſame thing ſhould be made and not
that that which hath been, ſhould not
; for the power which makes a thing ſo
was not made, and cauſeth a thing to have
s that it hath not been, does nothing; and
ıtly is no power. Nor can we ſay, that
: power can effect that any thing ſhould be
itſelf, that is, be the cauſe of it's own be-
that would be to cauſe that a thing ſhould
: it is, that is, be, when it is not, which
ıothing. We cannot ſay that the divine
ın effect, that twice two ſhould not make
: that would be to cauſe that things ſhould
hat they are, if they be at all, which is to
t things ſhould be and not be at all, when
which amounts to nothing.
annot ſay, the divine power can make a
be ſeen, and colour to be heard; for that
: to make colour and ſound all one, that is,

SERM. CLII.

things that differ, to be the ſame while they differ, which is to make colour and ſound not to be colour and ſound while they are ſo, which is to do nothing, and conſequently argues no power.

We cannot ſay, that the divine power can make that which is intrinſically and eſſentially good to be evil; and on the contrary: or that which is neceſſarily true to be falſe; and on the contrary. For to make that which is intrinſically and eſſentially good to be evil, is to make that which is always good to be ſometimes evil, that is, to be evil whilſt it is good, that is, to make good and evil all one; which is to bring two things together, which ſo ſoon as they do exiſt, deſtroy one another, which is to no purpoſe, becauſe it is to do juſt nothing; and there is the ſame reaſon of true and falſe.

We cannot ſay, that the power of GOD can cauſe that the ſame thing ſhould be hot and cold, dead and alive at the ſame time; becauſe theſe deſtroy one another, and if they were both, neither of them would be, and ſo the effect we attribute to this power would be nothing.

We cannot ſay, that the divine power can effect, that the ſame impreſſion ſhould give a thing two contrary motions, upward and downward at the ſame time; that the ſame body ſhould be in two contrary poſtures, in motion and at reſt, and in ſeveral places, which are the contradictions of tranſubſtantiation; for, the ſame body to be at the ſame time in two ſeveral places, is to be limited and circumſcribed by each of theſe, that is, ſo to be in each of them, as not to be in the other, or in any other; ſo that if it be in this place, it is not in that, nor in any other beſides this; if it be in that place, it is not in this, nor any other beſides that; but if it be in two, it is both in this and in that, and there-

fore

e in neither of them, nor any where elſe; ſo SERM.
t a power to make a body to be in two places at CLII.
æ, is a power to make it to be no where, that is,
: to be at all, which is no power; and there is
ſame reaſon of the ſame body's being in contrary
tion, or in motion and at reſt, or in two contrary
tures at the ſame time.

So that by all theſe inſtances it appears, that a
wer to do any thing which implies a contradiction,
l is repugnant to the nature of things, ſignifies
thing, and the ſuppoſed effect of it is only to
ng terms together, which if they could be brought
ether, ſo ſoon as they meet, will mutually take
ay and deſtroy one another, which would be vain
l to no purpoſe.

I have the more explicitly laid open theſe contra-
tions, with relation to the groſs doctrine of tran-
ſtantiation, in which all, or moſt of the contra-
tions which I have mentioned are involved. I
ow they ſtiffly deny, that theſe contradictions fol-
w from that doctrine, and uſe pitiful ſhifts to avoid
m; but being not able to ſatisfy themſelves that
y, if the worſt ſhould come to the worſt, they
n grant theſe contradictions, but then they fly
the power of GOD, which can do things which
: call contradictions; or elſe they ſay, there are
many contradictions in the doctrine of the Tri-
ty, which all Chriſtians believe. And thus they
proach chriſtianity to defend popery; and if they
nnot perſuade men to be papiſts, do what they
n to make them atheiſts, or at leaſt, to hinder
em from being Chriſtians: but there is not ſo
uch malice in this objection, but there is as little
ength. Is it any contradiction, that the ſame
ing ſhould be three and one in ſeveral reſpects?
hich is all that the ſcripture teacheth concerning

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the Trinity: but if men will undertake to explain this more particularly than GOD thought fit to do, and do it in ſuch a manner as that they cannot free themſelves from contradiction, let them look to it, the chriſtian religion is not at all concerned in this, farther than to cenſure ſuch mens boldneſs and curioſity.

But againſt this exemption of things that imply a contradiction from the compaſs and extent of the divine power, there are two objections which are more conſiderable, and deſerve to be taken notice of.

I. We grant GOD's fore-knowledge of future events, which ſeem to us to be impoſſible to be foreknown; now why may we not as well grant that GOD can do things which ſeem to us impoſſible to be done by any other power, as fore-know things which it is impoſſible for any underſtanding to know? For why ſhould we pretend to know the utmoſt of what infinite power can do, any more than the utmoſt of what infinite underſtanding can know?

Anſw. I know no reaſon but that the argument ſhould be granted, if there were an equal neceſſity of granting the poſſibility of thoſe things, which ſeem to us impoſſible to be done, that there is of granting the poſſibility of fore-knowing future contingencies, though they ſeem to us impoſſible to be known. We muſt grant the poſſibility of fore-knowing future contingencies, becauſe the ſcripture, which we believe to be a divine revelation, expreſly tells us, that GOD doth foreknow them, and gives us inſtances of it in ſeveral prophecies and predictions. Now if any man can ſhew me as expreſs texts which ſay, that GOD can make a body to be in two places at once, I will believe it, though I do not ſee how it is poſſible; becauſe it is reaſonable I ſhould believe that infinite power can do many things, the poſſibility

lity of which my finite underſtanding cannot reach. Now whereas the papiſts ſay, the ſcripture hath ſaid that from which this neceſſarily follows, viz. "This "is my body;" this is not enough, unleſs they could either prove, that it is neceſſary to underſtand all texts of ſcripture in a rigorous and ſtrict propriety of the letter, without admitting of any trope or figure in the words; which they do not pretend: or elſe ſhew a clear reaſon, why this ſhould be underſtood ſo, more than a thouſand others; which they have not done, and I think never can do. SERM. CLII.

But if it be farther argued; if we grant in one caſe, that thoſe things which ſeem to be contradictions to us may be poſſible, why not in all caſes? unleſs we had ſome certain way of diſtinguiſhing between ſeeming contradictions and real ones. And if we grant all contradictions poſſible, then there is no reaſon to exempt theſe from the extent of the divine power; but we may ſafely ſay, that the divine power can make a thing to be, and not to be at the ſame time. To this I anſwer,

1. I do not grant, that any thing, which ſeems to me to be a contradiction, ought to be granted by me to be poſſible, unleſs I have higher aſſurance and greater reaſon to believe it to be poſſible, than I have to believe it to be a contradiction; for example, ſuppoſe it were clearly revealed in ſcripture, that two bodies may be in the ſame place and at the ſame time (which is not, nor any thing like it) then having a revelation for this, and no revelation that it is not a contradiction, I have higher aſſurance and greater reaſon to believe it poſſible, than that it is a contradiction; and conſequently I have reaſon to believe it is no contradiction, and that from thence it would not follow, that the ſame thing may be, and not be at the ſame time: but though in caſe of

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divine revelation, I may believe that to be no contradiction, which ſeems to me to be a contradiction; yet I am not without great neceſſity and clear evidence to offer violence to reaſon, and affront the faculty of underſtanding which GOD hath endowed me withal, by entertaining any thing which ſeems to me to be a contradiction; which the papiſts do in the buſineſs of tranſubſtantiation, without any evidence of revelation, and conſequently without neceſſity.

2. But if this were revealed in ſcripture, that the ſame thing may be and not be at the ſame time, I could have no reaſon to believe that, becauſe I could have no aſſurance, if that were true, that the ſcriptures were a divine revelation, or that it were to be believed if it were; for if it were true that the ſame thing may be and not be, then a divine revelation may be no divine revelation; and when I am bound to believe a thing, I may be bound at the ſame time not to believe it, and ſo all things would fall into uncertainty; and the foundation of all aſſurance, and of all duty and obedience, both of faith and practice, would be taken away.

The 2d objection is from the power of creation, which is generally acknowledged to be a making of ſomething out of nothing: Now, ſay the objectors, this ſeems as palpable a contradiction as any thing elſe.

Anſw. To us indeed, who converſe with material things, and never ſaw any thing made, but out of pre-exiſtent matter, it is very hard to conceive how any thing ſhould be created, that is produced out of nothing: but every thing that is ſtrange is not a contradiction. It is ſtrange to us, and hard to conceive, that there ſhould be ſuch a thing as a ſpirit, who never ſaw, nor can ſee any thing but matter; and yet we grant there are ſpirits. It is hard to us to conceive how any thing ſhould be made, but out of matter;

atter; and yet ſpirit, if it were made of any thing SERM. e-exiſtent, cannot be made of matter: but if we CLII. ll attend to thoſe common dictates of reaſon, which very man, whether he will or no, muſt aſſent to, : may eaſily underſtand creation to be poſſible, and ee from contradiction. For the clearing of this, will proceed by theſe ſteps:

1. The true notion of creation is the bringing of mething into being, which before had no being at l; for the phraſe of making ſomething out of no-ing, or out of no pre-exiſtent matter, does miſlead ar underſtandings into odd conceits, as if nothing ould be the material cauſe of ſomething, or as if othing could be what is material.

2. Every one muſt grant, that ſomething is; for e ſee that things are, however they came to be.

3. Every one muſt grant, that ſomething is of ſelf, whether matter, or that being which we call OD.

4. Every one muſt grant, that that which was of ſelf was always; for nothing can begin to be of ſelf.

5. It is much more eaſy to conceive how a thing, hat once was not, might ſometime be brought into eing by another, than how a thing ſhould be al-ays of itſelf; for that which once was not, is ſup-oſed to have ſomething before it, by which it night be made, though not out of which it was nade; but that which was always, neither had nor ould have any thing by which, or out of which it ould be made. And why cannot a thing come into being, when there was nothing before it, out of which it was made, as well as a thing be always, when there could not be any thing before it, out of which it ſhould be?

Secondly,

SERM. CLII. Secondly, I exempt thoſe things from the extent of omnipotence, which imply imperfection, which are contrary to the nature and perfection of GOD, both natural and moral imperfections; for theſe alſo deſtroy power, becauſe they are not arguments of power, but of impotence. Natural imperfections; as to die, to be ſick, to be in want, to eat, to ſleep, to forget, &c. Moral imperfections, thoſe which contradict the holineſs of GOD, as ſin and vice, or to compel any to ſin; which contradict his goodneſs, as to be cruel; which contradict his truth, as to lie, to deceive, to break his promiſe, to deny himſelf; Tit. i. 2. 2 Tim. ii. 13. Jam. i. 12. He is ſaid to be ἀπείρας κακῶν; contrary to the conſtancy and immutability of his nature, as to change his decree, to repent; contrary to juſtice and equity, as for ever to ſpare and to pardon obſtinate ſinners, eternally to puniſh innocent and good men; for theſe are moral imperfections, and contradict the holineſs, and truth, and goodneſs, and juſtice, and immutability of the divine nature; and that diſtinction between GOD's abſolute and ordinate power, that is, that GOD hath an abſolute power of doing ſome things, which yet upon ſuppoſition of his decree, or promiſe, or goodneſs, or juſtice, he cannot do, is vain and frivolous, unleſs men mean by it only this, that ſome things, which argue an imperfection, do not imply a contradiction, which is moſt true; but both theſe are abſolutely and equally impoſſible to GOD. I proceed to the

Second thing I propoſed, that this perfection belongs to GOD; and this I ſhall ſhew,

I. From the dictates of natural light.

II. From the ſcripture, or divine revelation.

I. From the dictates of natural light. This was one of the moſt uſual titles which the heathens gave

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to their ſupreme deity, *Optimus maximus*; next to his goodneſs they placed his greatneſs, which does chiefly appear in his power; and they did not only attribute a great power to him, but an omnipotence. *Nihil eſt quod Deus efficere non poteſt*, ſaith Tully de Div. Now their natural reaſon did convince them, that this perfection did belong to GOD by theſe three arguments: SERM. CLII.

1. From thoſe two great inſtances and expreſſions of his power, creation and providence; for the heathens did generally acknowledge the making of the world, and the preſervation and government of it, to be the effects of power, determined by goodneſs, and regulated by wiſdom. Hence they gave thoſe titles to GOD of *Opifex rerum*, and *Rector mundi*. I ſay generally; I except Ariſtotle, who ſuppoſed the world not to have been made, but to have been from eternity; and Epicurus with his followers, who aſcribed the regular and orderly frame of nature to a happy caſualty and fortunate concourſe of atoms: but generally the wiſer did look upon the vaſt frame of nature, this ſtately fabrick of the world, and the upholding and preſerving of it, as an argument of a divine and inviſible power. And ſo the apoſtle tells us, Rom. i. 20. that by the light of nature, "the inviſible things of GOD were clearly ſeen by "the things that were made, even his eternal power "and godhead."

2. Becauſe all other perfections without this would be inſignificant and ineffectual, or elſe could not be at all. Without this, goodneſs would be an empty piece of good meaning, and not able to give any demoſtration of itſelf; knowledge would be an idle ſpeculation; and wiſdom to contrive things, without power to effect them, would be an uſeleſs thing. There would be no ſuch thing as juſtice, if

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SERM. CLII. the divine nature were without a power to reward and puniſh; no ſuch thing as faithfulneſs, if he had not a power to perform what he promiſes; no providence, for it would be in vain for him that hath no power to take upon him to govern and intermeddle in the affairs of the world.

3. Without this there could be no religion. Take away the power of GOD, and there can be no foundation of faith and truſt, no reaſon for fear; all arguments from hope and fear would be taken away; we could not expect any good, nor fear any harm from an impotent being that could do nothing. The ſanction of GOD's laws would be taken away. To give authority to laws, there muſt not only be a right to command, but power to back thoſe commands; the grand ſecurity and laſt reſort of all government and authority is power. James iv. 12. "There is one law-giver, who is able to ſave, and "to deſtroy." None can be a law-giver, but he that hath this power, to reward and puniſh, to make men happy or miſerable, "to ſave, or to deſtroy." Men would not pray to GOD, nor make any addreſs to him, if they did not believe he were able to ſupply their wants, and relieve them in their ſtraits; *Nec in hunc furorem omnes mortales conſenſiſſent alloquendi ſurda numina & inefficaces deos*, Sen. There would be no encouragement for men to ſerve GOD, if they did not believe that he were able to reward them, and bring them to happineſs, and to defend them againſt all the enemies of their welfare, ſo that it ſhould not be in the power of the moſt malicious ſpirits to hinder them of their happineſs.

II. From ſcripture or divine revelation. In producing texts to this purpoſe, I will proceed by theſe ſteps.

1. Take notice of thoſe which in general aſcribe power,

power, and might, and ſtrength to GOD. Pſal. xxiv. 8. "The LORD, ſtrong and mighty. So girt with "power; the mighty GOD; thine is the greatneſs "and the power; thine is the kingdom, and the "power, and the glory." Of the ſame nature are thoſe places which call upon all creatures to aſcribe this to GOD; "Give unto the LORD, ye mighty, "give unto the LORD glory and ſtrength." SERM. CLII.

2. Thoſe which aſcribe this to GOD in an eminent degree. Job ix. 4. "He is mighty in ſtrength; "excellent in power; who is like unto him? The "LORD Jahovah is everlaſting ſtrength."

3. Thoſe texts which aſcribe ſuch a power as tranſcends any human or created power. Such as thoſe which expreſs all the power which men have to be derived from GOD; John xix. 11. "Thou "couldſt have no power at all, except it were "given thee from above." And thoſe which advance the power of GOD above the power of men; Luke xviii. 27. "The things which are impoſſible "with men, are poſſible with GOD; he is able to "do exceeding abundantly above all that we can "aſk or think." Eph. iii. 20. 2 Chron. xx. 6. Job ix. 4. "According to his mighty power, "whereby he is able to ſubdue all things to himſelf." Phil. iii. 21. Dan. iv. 35. Thoſe which declare all things to be equally eaſy to him, and nothing difficult; "There is nothing too hard for thee," Jer. xxxii. 17. 2 Chron. xiv. 11. 1 Sam. xiv. 6.

4. Thoſe which aſcribe all power to him, by the titles of almighty, all-ſufficient, Gen. xvii. 1. Rev. iv. 8, 11. xv. 3. xvi. 7. xix. 16. Job xlii. 2. "Thou canſt do all things." Matth. xix. 6. Mark x. 27. Luke i. 37.

I have diſpatched what I propoſed upon this argument; give me leave to apply all in the following *particulars.*

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Uſe. Firſt, The conſideration of GOD's omnipotence may cauſe terror to wicked men. All this power which I have deſcribed, or rather, which is ſo great that I cannot deſcribe it, is engaged againſt ſinners; "His power and his wrath is againſt all "that forſake him," Ezra viii. 22. And who knows what thoſe words ſignify, Pſal. xc. 11. "Who knoweth the power of thine anger? As is "thy fear, ſo is thy wrath." There is no paſſion in the heart of man more infinite than our fear; it troubles us with jealouſy and ſuſpicion of the utmoſt that may happen; but when we have extended our fears to the utmoſt, the power of GOD's wrath reacheth farther. Whenever we ſin, we challenge the Almighty, and dare infinite power to do it's worſt to us; Job xv. 25. ſpeaking of the wicked man, "He ſtretcheth out his hand againſt GOD, and "ſtrengtheneth himſelf againſt the Almighty." Whom wilt thou fear, if not him who can make thee extremely happy or miſerable for ever? "Will ye pro-"voke the LORD to jealouſy? are ye ſtronger than "he?" Becauſe he doth nothing againſt thee for the preſent, thinkeſt thou he can do nothing? Nah. i. 3. "He is ſlow to anger, and great in power, and will "not acquit the wicked." There is a day coming, when "the Son of man ſhall come in the clouds of "heaven, with power and great glory."

Secondly, The conſideration of GOD's omnipotence ſhould check the pride and vain confidence of men. What have we to be proud of? "What have "we that we have not received? Where then is "cauſe of boaſting? Who may glory in his ſight?" Thoſe that have the greateſt power ſhould remember whence it is derived, and render back the glory of it to the fountain of it. Pſal. xxix. 1. "Give "unto the LORD, O ye mighty, give unto the

"LORD

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"LORD glory and ſtrength." So likewiſe it ſhould take men off from relying upon their own ſtrength, which at the beſt is but "an arm of fleſh," as the ſcripture calls it, for the weakneſs of it. Do we not ſee that many times "the battle is not to the ſtrong?" that things are not done "by might and by power, "but by the ſpirit of the LORD." When he appears againſt the moſt potent, "their hearts melt within "them, and there is no more ſpirit left in them," as it is ſaid of the mighty inhabitants of Canaan, Joſh. v. 1.

Thirdly, We ſhould make this omnipotence of GOD the object of our truſt and confidence. This is the moſt proper uſe we can make of this doctrine, as David does in this Pſalm; and this was uſed for a form of bleſſing the people in the name of GOD; Pſal. cxxxiv. 3. "The LORD that made heaven and "earth, bleſs thee." And David, when he magnifies GOD's deliverance of his people from the multitude of their enemies, reſolves it into this, "our "help ſtandeth in the name of the LORD, who made "heaven and earth." Thus did the great pattern and example of faith encourage and ſupport his confidence in GOD in a very difficult trial; he ſtaggered not at it, becauſe "he believed GOD, who quicken-"eth the dead, and calleth thoſe things that be not, "as though they were: therefore againſt hope he "believed in hope," &c. Rom. iv. 17, &c. This gives life to all our devotion, to be perſuaded that "GOD is able to do for us exceedingly above what "we can aſk or think," and that "his is the king-"dom, the power, and the glory."

I ſhall only caution two things, as to our reliance on the power of GOD.

I. Labour to be ſuch perſons, to whom GOD hath promiſed that he will engage and employ his omnipotence for their good. If we hope for any good

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SERM. CLII. from the Almighty, we muſt "walk before him, "and be perfect," as he ſaid to Abraham. Good men have a peculiar intereſt in God's power; hence he is called "the ſtrength of Iſrael," and "the "mighty one of Iſrael." If we do what God requires of us, we may expect that he will put forth his power, and exert his arm for us; but if we diſobey, we muſt expect he will manifeſt his power againſt us, Ez. viii. 22. When we "do well," we may "commit the keeping of our ſouls to him," 1 Pet. iv. 19.

II. Our expectations from the omnipotence of God muſt be with ſubmiſſion to his pleaſure, and goodneſs, and wiſdom; we muſt not expect that God will manifeſt his power, when we think there is occaſion for it; but when it ſeems beſt to him, he will ſo employ his omnipotence, as to manifeſt his goodneſs and wiſdom.

And with theſe two cautions, we may rely upon him in all our wants, both ſpiritual and temporal; for his divine power can "give us all things that "pertain to life and godlineſs;" 2 Pet. i. 3. We may truſt him at all times, for the omnipotent God "neither ſlumbereth nor ſleepeth; the Almighty "fainteth not, neither is he weary: truſt ye in the "LORD for ever, for in the LORD Jehovah is ever-"laſting ſtrength."

SER.

SERMON CLIII.

The ſpirituality of the divine nature.

JOHN iv. 24.

GOD *is a ſpirit, and they that worſhip him, muſt worſhip him in ſpirit and in truth.*

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THESE are the words of our SAVIOUR to the woman of Samaria, who was ſpeaking to him of the difference between the Samaritans and the Jews concerning religion; ver. 20. "Our fa-"thers worſhipped in this mountain; but ye ſay, "that in Jeruſalem is the place where men ought to "worſhip." CHRIST tells her, "the time was "coming, when the worſhippers of GOD ſhould "neither be confined to that mountain, nor to "Jeruſalem; but men ſhould worſhip the father in "ſpirit and in truth;" when this carnal, and ceremonial, and typical worſhip of GOD ſhould be exalted into a more ſpiritual, a more real, and true, and ſubſtantial religion, which ſhould not be confined to one temple, but ſhould be univerſally diffuſed through the world. Now ſuch a worſhip as this is moſt agreeable to the nature of GOD; for he is a ſpirit, and "thoſe who worſhip him, muſt worſhip him in "ſpirit and in truth." In the words we have,

Firſt, A propoſition laid down, "GOD is a ſpirit."

Secondly, A corollary, or inference, deduced from it, "they that worſhip him, muſt worſhip him in "ſpirit and in truth." I ſhall ſpeak of the propoſiti-

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on, as that which concerns my preſent deſign; and afterward ſpeak ſomething to the corollary, or inference, deduced from it, together with ſome other inferences drawn from this truth, by way of application.

Firſt, "That GOD is a ſpirit." This expreſſion is ſingular, and not to be parallelled again in the ſcripture; indeed we have often mention made in the ſcripture of "the ſpirit of GOD," and "the "ſpirit of the LORD," which ſignifies a divine power and energy; and of "the holy ſpirit," ſignifying the third perſon in the Trinity; GOD is called "the "GOD of the ſpirits of all fleſh;" Num. xvi. 22. xxvii. 16. much in the ſame ſenſe, as he is called "the father of ſpirits," Heb. xii. 9. that is, the creator of the ſouls of men; but we no where meet with this expreſſion, or any other equivalent to it, that "GOD is a ſpirit," but only in this place; nor had it been uſed here, but to prove that the beſt worſhip of GOD, that which is moſt proper to him, is ſpiritual: ſo that the thing which our SAVIOUR here intends, is not to prove the ſpiritual nature of GOD, but that his worſhip ought to be ſpiritual; nor indeed is there any neceſſity that it ſhould have been any where ſaid in ſcripture, that "GOD is a "ſpirit," it being the natural notion of a GOD; no more than it is neceſſary that it ſhould be told us, that GOD is good, or that he is infinite, and eternal, and the like; or that the ſcripture ſhould prove to us the being of a GOD. All theſe are manifeſt by the light of nature, and if the ſcripture mentions them, it is *ex abundanti*, and it is uſually in order to ſome farther purpoſe.

For we are to know, that the ſcripture ſuppoſeth us to be men, and to partake of the common notions of human nature, and therefore doth not teach

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us philoſophy, nor ſolicitouſly inſtruct us in thoſe things which are born with us; but ſuppoſeth the knowledge of theſe, and makes uſe of theſe common principles and notions which are in us concerning GOD, and the immortality of our ſouls, and the life to come, to excite us to our duty, and quicken our endeavours after happineſs. For I do not find that the doctrine of the immortality of the ſoul, i any where expreſly delivered in ſcripture, but taken for granted; in like manner, that the ſcripture doth not ſolicitouſly inſtruct us in the natural notions which we have of GOD, but ſuppoſeth them known to us; and if it mention them, it is not ſo much in order to knowledge as to practice; and therefore we need not wonder that this expreſſion, which doth ſet forth to us the nature of GOD, is but once uſed in ſcripture, and that brought in upon occaſion, and for another purpoſe, becauſe it is a thing naturally known. Plato ſays, that GOD is ἀσώματος, without body. In like manner Tully, *Nec enim Deus ipſe qui intelligitur á nobis alio modo intelligi poteſt, niſi mens quædam ſoluta & libera, ſegregata ab omni concretione mortali*; "we cannot conceive of GOD, but as of a pure "mind, intirely free from all mortal compoſition or "mixture." And Plutarch after him, νοῦς ἂν ὁ θεὸς, χωριστὸν εἶδος, τελέως τὸ ἀμιγὲς πάσης ὕλης, μηδενὶ παθητῷ συμπεπλεγμένον, "GOD is a mind, an ab-"ſtract being, pure from all matter, and diſintangled "from whatever is paſſible or capable of ſuffering."

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So that natural light informing us that GOD is a ſpirit, there was no need why the ſcripture ſhould inculcate this: it is an excellent medium or argument to prove that the worſhip of GOD ſhould chiefly be ſpiritual; and although it was not neceſſary that it ſhould have been mentioned for itſelf, that is, to inform us of a thing which we could not o-

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therwiſe know, yet the wiſdom of GOD, by the expreſs mention of this, ſeems to have provided againſt an error, which ſome weaker and groſſer ſpirits might be ſubject to. You know GOD is pleaſed, by way of condeſcenſion and accommodation of himſelf to our capacity, to repreſent himſelf to us in ſcripture by human imperfections, and gives ſuch deſcriptions of himſelf as if he had a body, and bodily members; now to prevent any error or miſtake that might be occaſioned hereby, it ſeems very becoming the wiſdom of GOD, ſomewhere in ſcripture expreſly to declare the ſpiritual nature of GOD, that none through weakneſs or wilfulneſs might entertain groſs apprehenſions of him. In ſpeaking to this propoſition, I ſhall,

I. Explain what is meant by a ſpirit.

II. Endeavour to prove to you, that GOD is a ſpirit.

III. Anſwer an objection or two.

IV. Draw ſome inferences or corollaries from the whole.

I. For the explication of the notion of a ſpirit. I ſhall not trouble you with the ſtrict philoſophical notion of it, as that it is ſuch a ſubſtance as is penetrable, that is, may be in the ſame place with a body, and neither keep out the body, nor be kept out by it; and that the parts which we imagine in it cannot be divided, that is, really ſeparated and torn from one another, as the parts of a body; but I will give you a negative deſcription of it. A ſpirit is not matter, it doth not fall under any of our ſenſes, it is that which we cannot ſee nor touch; it is not a body, not fleſh, and blood, and bones; for ſo we find ſpirit in ſcripture oppoſed to fleſh and body; Iſa. xxxi. 3. "Their horſes are fleſh, and not ſpirit." So Luke xxiv. when CHRIST appeared to his diſciples after his reſurrection, they were terrified, and "ſuppoſed

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" it had been a ſpirit," v. 39. But he ſaid, " Be- SERM. CLIII.
" hold my hands and my feet, that it is I myſelf;
" handle me, and ſee, for a ſpirit hath not fleſh and
" bones, as ye ſee me have.". The moſt uſual deſcription of a ſpirit is by theſe negatives, it is not a body, hath not fleſh and bones, doth not conſiſt of matter, or of any thing that falls under our ſenſes, that we can ſee or touch.

II. For the proof of this propoſition, that " God " is a ſpirit." This is not to be proved by way of demonſtration; for there is nothing before God, or which can be a cauſe of him; but by way of conviction, by ſhewing the abſurdity of the contrary. The firſt and moſt natural notion that we have of God, is, that he is a being every way perfect; and from this notion we muſt argue concerning the properties which are attributed to God, and govern all our reaſonings concerning God by this; ſo that when any thing is ſaid of God, the beſt way to know whether it be to be attributed to him, is to inquire whether it be a perfection or not; if it be, it belongs to him; if it be not, it is to be removed from him; and if any man aſk, why I ſay God is ſo, or ſo, a ſpirit, or good, or juſt? the beſt reaſon that can be given is, becauſe theſe are perfections, and the contrary to theſe are imperfections. So that if I ſhew that it would be an imperfection for God to be imagined to be a body, or matter, I prove that he is a ſpirit, becauſe it is an imperfection, that is, an abſurdity to imagine him any thing elſe. To imagine God to be a body, or matter, doth evidently contradict four great perfections of God.

1. His infiniteneſs, or the immenſity of his being. Grant me but theſe two things, that there is ſomething in the world beſides God, ſome other matter, as the heavens, the air, the earth, and all thoſe things

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which we ſee; and grant me that two bodies cannot be in the ſame place at once, and then it will evidently follow, that where-ever theſe are, GOD is ſhut out; and conſequently GOD ſhould not be infinite, nor in all places; and ſo much as there is of another matter in the world beſides GOD, ſo many breaches there would be in the divine nature, ſo many *Hiatus's*.

2. The knowledge and wiſdom of GOD. It cannot be imagined how mere matter can underſtand, how it can diſtinctly comprehend ſuch variety of objects, and at one view take in paſt, preſent, and to come. Tully, ſpeaking of ſpirits, ſaith, *Animorum nulla in terris origo inveniri poteſt*; "their original "cannot be found upon earth;" for, ſaith he, "there is no material or bodily thing," *Quod vim memoriæ, mentis, cogitationis habeat, quod & præterita teneat, & futura provideat, & complecti poſſit præſentia; quæ ſola divina ſunt*; "which hath the "power of memory, of underſtanding, of thought; "which can retain things paſt, foreſee things fu"ture, and comprehend things preſent; all which "powers are purely divine."

3. Freedom and liberty. For the laws of matter are neceſſary, nor can we imagine any αὐτεξούσιον, any arbitrary principle in it. This puzzled the Epicureans, as we ſee in Lucretius, "for if (ſays he) "all things move by certain and neceſſary laws, and "there be a connexion of the parts of matter unto "each other, ſo that if you move this, that muſt "neceſſarily be moved; whence, ſaith he, is li"berty?" *Unde eſt hæc inquam fatis avulſa voluntas*; "whence is this principle of will, whoſe mo"tions are not under any law of neceſſity."

4. Goodneſs. This follows from the former; for he is not good who does not know what he does,

nor does it freely; ſo that take away underſtanding and liberty, and you take away goodneſs; now take away from GOD infiniteneſs, and knowledge, and liberty, and goodneſs, and you diveſt him of his glory; you take away his moſt eſſential perfections. So that theſe great abſurdities following from the ſuppoſing of GOD to be mere matter or body, we are to conceive of him as another kind of ſubſtance, that is, a ſpirit. So that I wonder that the author of the Leviathan, who doth more than once expreſly affirm, that there can be nothing in the world, but what is material and corporeal, did not ſee that the neceſſary conſequence of this poſition is to baniſh GOD out of the world. I would not be uncharitable, but I doubt, he did ſee it, and was content with the conſequence, and willing the world ſhould entertain it; for it is ſo evident, that by ſuppoſing the divine eſſence to conſiſt of matter, the immenſity of the divine nature is taken away; and it is alſo ſo utterly unimaginable how mere matter ſhould underſtand, and be endowed with liberty, and conſequently with goodneſs, that I cannot but vehemently ſuſpect the man who denies GOD to be a ſpirit, either to have a groſs and faulty underſtanding, or a very ill-will againſt GOD, and an evil deſign to root out of the minds of men the belief of a GOD. I come in the

III. Place, to conſider the objections.

1. Obj. Why then is GOD repreſented to us ſo often in ſcripture by the parts and members of mens bodies? Anſ. I ſhall only ſay at preſent, that all theſe deſcriptions and repreſentations of GOD are plainly made to comply with our weakneſs, by way of condeſcenſion and accommodation to our capacities.

2. Obj. How is it ſaid that "man was made af-

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" ter the image of GOD," if GOD be a ſpirit of which there can be no likeneſs nor reſemblance? Anſ. Man is not ſaid to be " made after the image of GOD," in reſpect of the outward ſhape and features of his body; but in reſpect of the qualities of his mind, as holineſs and righteouſneſs, or of his faculties, as underſtanding and will; or, which the text ſeems moſt to favour, in reſpect of his dominion and ſovereignty over the creatures; for in the two former reſpects the angels are made after the image of GOD. Now this ſeems to be ſpoken peculiarly of men; Gen. i. 24. " Let us make man in our own image, " after our own likeneſs, and let them have domi- " nion over the fiſh of the ſea, and the fowls of the " air," &c.

IV. I come now to draw ſome inferences or corollaries from hence, and they ſhall be partly ſpeculative, partly practical.

Firſt, ſpeculative inferences.

1. That GOD is inviſible. The proper object of ſight is colour, and that ariſeth from the various diſpoſition of the parts of matter which cauſe ſeveral reflections of light; now a ſpirit hath no parts nor matter, and therefore is inviſible; 1 Tim. i. 17. " Unto the eternal, immortal, inviſible, the only " wiſe GOD." Heb. xi. 27. " He endured, as ſee- " ing him who is inviſible;" as ſeeing him by an eye of faith, who is inviſible by an eye of ſenſe. 1 Tim. vi. 16. " Whom no man hath ſeen, nor " can ſee."

When Moſes and the elders of Iſrael are ſaid to have ſeen GOD, and Jacob to have " ſeen him face " to face," Exod. ii. 6. Gen. xxxii. 30. it is meant of an angel covered with divine glory and majeſty, as we ſhall ſee if we compare theſe with other texts. When Moſes is ſaid to have " ſpoken to him face to " face,"

"face," that is familiarly; and ſo Micaiah, 1 Kings xxii. 19. is ſaid to have "ſeen GOD upon his throne, "and all Iſrael ſcattered up and down;" this was in a viſion. And it is promiſed, that in heaven we ſhall ſee GOD, that is, have a more perfect knowledge of him and full enjoyment; as to "ſee good days," is to enjoy them. Thoſe texts where it is ſaid, "No man can ſee GOD and live," Exod. xxxiii. 20. and John i. 18. "No man hath ſeen GOD at "any time," do not intimate that GOD is viſible, though we cannot ſee him; but ſeeing is metaphorically uſed for knowing; and the meaning is, that in this life we are not capable of a perfect knowledge of GOD. A clear diſcovery of GOD to our underſtanding would let in joys into our ſouls, and create deſires in us too great for frail mortality to bear.

2. That he is "the living GOD." Spirit and life are often put together in ſcripture.

3. That GOD is immortal. This the ſcripture attributes to him, 1 Tim. i. 17. "To the king "immortal, inviſible." 1 Tim. vi. 16. "Who only "hath immortality." This alſo flows from GOD's ſpirituality; a ſpiritual nature hath no principles of corruption in it, nothing that is liable to periſh, or decay, or die. Now this doth ſo eminently agree to GOD, either becauſe he is purely ſpiritual, and immaterial, as poſſibly no creature is; or elſe becauſe he is not only immortal in his own nature, but is not liable to be reduced to nothing by any other, becauſe he hath an original and independent immortality, and therefore the apoſtle doth attribute it to him in ſuch a ſingular and peculiar manner; "Who only "hath immortality."

Secondly, practical inferences.

1. We are not to conceive of GOD as having a body, or any corporeal ſhape or members. This

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was the groſs conceit of the Anthropomorphites of old, and of ſome Socinians of late, which they ground upon the groſs and literal interpretation of many figurative ſpeeches in ſcripture concerning GOD, as where it ſpeaks of his face, and hand, and arm, &c. But we are very unthankful to GOD, who condeſcends to repreſent himſelf to us according to our capacities, if we abuſe this condeſcenſion to the blemiſh and reproach of the divine nature. If GOD be pleaſed to ſtoop to our weakneſs, we muſt not therefore level him to our infirmities.

2. If GOD be a ſpirit, we are not to worſhip GOD by any image or ſenſible repreſentation. Becauſe "GOD is a ſpirit," we are not to liken him to any thing that is corporeal; we are not to repreſent him by "the likeneſs of any thing that is in any heaven "above," that is, of any birds; "or in the earth "beneath," that is, of any beaſt; "or in the wa-"ters under the earth," that is, of any fiſh; as it is in the ſecond commandment. For, as the prophet tells us, there is nothing that we can liken GOD to; Iſa. xl. 18. "To whom will ye liken GOD? or "what likeneſs will ye compare to him?" We debaſe his ſpiritual and incorruptible nature, when we compare him to corruptible creatures; Rom. i. 22, 23. Speaking of the heathen idolatry, "Who pro-"feſſing themſelves wiſe, became fools, and chang-"ed the glory of the incorruptible GOD into an "image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, "and to four-footed beaſts, and creeping things. "They became fools;" this is the folly of idolatry, to liken a ſpirit, which hath no bodily ſhape, to things that are corporeal and corruptible. So that however ſome are pleaſed to mince the matter, I cannot ſee how the church of Rome, which worſhips GOD by or towards ſome image or ſenſible repreſentation,

tation, can be excuſed from idolatry; and the church of England doth not without very juſt cauſe challenge the Romiſh church with it, and make it a ground of ſeparation from her. SERM. CLIII.

3. If "God be a ſpirit," then we ſhould "worſhip him in ſpirit and in truth." This is the inference of the text, and therefore I ſhall ſpeak a little more largely of it; only I muſt explain what is meant by "worſhipping in ſpirit and in truth," and ſhew you the force of this conſequence, how it follows, that becauſe "God is a ſpirit," therefore he muſt be "worſhipped in ſpirit and in truth."

1. For the explication of it. This word ſpirit is ſometimes applied to the doctrine of the goſpel, and ſo it is oppoſed to letter, by which name the doctrine of Moſes is called; 2 Cor. iii. 6. "Who hath "made us able miniſters of the new teſtament, not "of the letter, but of the ſpirit;" not of the law which was written on tables of ſtone, but which Christ by his ſpirit writes in the hearts of believers. Sometimes to the worſhip of the goſpel; and ſo it is oppoſed to the fleſh, Gal. iii. 3. "Having be-"gun in the ſpirit, are ye now made perfect by the "fleſh?" that is by the works of the ceremonial law, which is therefore called fleſh, becauſe the principal ceremony of it, circumciſion, was made in the fleſh, and becauſe their ſacrifices, a chief part of their worſhip, were of the fleſh of beaſts; and becauſe the greateſt part of their ordinances, as waſhing, and the like, related to the body. Hence it is the apoſtle calls the worſhip of the Jews, "the law of "a carnal commandment," Heb. vii. 16. and Heb. ix. 10. Carnal ordinances, ſpeaking of the ſervice of the law, "which," ſaith he, "ſtood in meats, "and drinks, and divers waſhings, and carnal ordi-"nances." Now in oppoſition to this carnal and ceremonial

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ceremonial worſhip, we are to "worſhip GOD in the "ſpirit." The worſhip of the Jews was moſt a bodily ſervice; but we are to give GOD a reaſonable ſervice, to ſerve him with the "ſpirit of our minds," as the apoſtle ſpeaks; inſtead of "offering the fleſh "of bulls and goats," we are to "conſecrate our "ſelves" to the ſervice of GOD: "this is a holy "and acceptable ſacrifice," or "reaſonable ſervice."

"And in truth." Either in oppoſition to the falſe worſhip of the Samaritans (as "in ſpirit" is oppoſed to the worſhip of the Jews) as our SAVIOUR tells the woman, that "they worſhipped they knew not "what;" or (which I rather think) in oppoſition to the ſhadows of the law; and ſo it is oppoſed, John i. 17. "The law was given by Moſes: but grace "and truth came by JESUS CHRIST."

Not that the external ſervice of GOD is here excluded; not that we are to ſhew no outward reverence to him: but that as under the law, the ſervice of GOD was chiefly external and corporeal, ſo now it ſhould chiefly be inward and ſpiritual; the worſhip of GOD under the goſpel ſhould chiefly be ſpiritual and ſubſtantial, not a carnal, and bodily, and ceremonious devotion.

2dly. For the force of the conſequence, it doth not lie in this, that juſt ſuch as GOD is, ſuch muſt our worſhip of him be; for this would exclude all bodily and outward worſhip; our worſhip of GOD muſt therefore be inviſible, eternal, &c. for ſo is he; and beſides, the will of GOD ſeems rather to be the rule of his worſhip, than his nature: but the force of it is this, GOD is of a ſpiritual nature, and this is to be ſuppoſed to be his will, that our worſhip ſhould be as agreeable to the object of it, as the nature of the creature who is to give it will bear; now, ſaith CHRIST to the woman, the Jews and the

the Samaritans limit their worſhip to a certain place, and it conſiſts chiefly in certain carnal rites and ordinances; but, ſaith he, though GOD hath permitted this for a time, becauſe of the carnality and "hard-"neſs of their hearts," yet the time is coming, when a more ſpiritual, and ſolid, and ſubſtantial worſhip of GOD is to be introduced, which will be free from all particular places and rites, not tied to the temple, or to ſuch external ceremonies, but conſiſting in the devotion of our ſpirit, even the inward frame and temper of our hearts; all outward circumſtances (excepting thoſe of the two ſacraments, which are poſitive) being left by the goſpel to as great a liberty, as natural neceſſity and decency will permit.

We muſt worſhip GOD, and therefore it is naturally neceſſary that we ſhould do it ſomewhere, in ſome place; now ſeeing ſomebody muſt determine this, it is moſt convenient that authority ſhould determine it according to the conveniency of cohabitation. We muſt not be rude, nor do any thing that is naturally undecent in the worſhip of GOD; this authority ſhould reſtrain; but farther than this, I doubt not but the goſpel hath left us free; and to this end, that the leſs we are tied to external obſervances, the more intent we ſhould be upon the ſpiritual and ſubſtantial parts of religion, the conforming of ourſelves to the mind and will of GOD, endeavouring to be like unto GOD, and to have our ſouls and ſpirits engaged in thoſe duties we perform to him. So that our SAVIOUR'S argument is this; "GOD is a ſpirit," that is, "the moſt excellent "nature and being," and therefore muſt be ſerved with the beſt. We conſiſt of body and ſoul, it is true, and we muſt ſerve him with our whole man; but principally with our ſouls, which are the moſt excellent part of ourſelves; the ſervice of our mind

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and ſpirit is the beſt we can perform, and therefore moſt agreeable to GOD, who is a ſpirit, and the beſt and moſt perfect being.

So that the inference is this, that if "GOD be "a ſpirit, we muſt worſhip him in ſpirit, and in "truth;" our religion muſt be real, and inward, and ſincere, and ſubſtantial; we muſt not think to put off GOD with external obſervances, and with bodily reverence and attendance; this we muſt give him, but we muſt principally regard that our ſervice of him be reaſonable, that is, directed by our underſtandings, and accompanied with our affections. Our religion muſt conſiſt principally in a ſincere love and affection to GOD, which expreſſeth itſelf in a real conformity of our lives and actions to his will; and when we make our ſolemn approaches to him, in the duties of his worſhip and ſervice, we muſt perform all acts of outward worſhip to GOD with a pure and ſincere mind; whatever we do in the ſervice of GOD, we muſt "do it heartily as to the LORD." GOD is a pure ſpirit, preſent to our ſpirits, intimate to our ſouls, and conſcious to the moſt ſecret and retired motions of our hearts: now becauſe we ſerve the ſearcher of hearts, we muſt ſerve him with our hearts.

Indeed if we did worſhip GOD only to be ſeen of men, a pompous and external worſhip would be very ſuitable to ſuch an end; but religion is not intended to pleaſe men, but GOD; and therefore it muſt be ſpiritual, and inward, and real.

And where-ever the external part of religion is principally regarded, and men are more careful to worſhip GOD with outward pomp and ceremony, than "in ſpirit and in truth," religion degenerates into ſuperſtition, and men embrace the ſhadow of religion, and let go the ſubſtance. And this the church of

of Rome hath done almoſt to the utter ruin of chriſtianity; ſhe hath clogged religion, and the worſhip of GOD, with ſo many rites and ceremonies, under one pretence or other, that the yoke of CHRIST is become heavier than that of Moſes; and they have made the goſpel a more carnal commandment than the law; and whatever Chriſtians or churches are intent upon external rites and obſervances, to the neglect of the weightier parts of religion, regarding meats and drinks, &c. to the prejudice of righteouſneſs and peace, wherein the kingdom of GOD conſiſts, they advance a religion as contrary to the nature of GOD, and as unſuitable to the genius and temper of the goſpel, as can be imagined.

It is an obſervation of Sir Edwin Sands, that as children are pleaſed with toys, ſo, ſaith he, it is a pitiful and childiſh ſpirit that is predominant in the contrivers and zealots of a ceremonious religion. I deny not, but that very honeſt and devout men may be this way addicted; but the wiſer any man is, the better he underſtands the nature of GOD and of religion, the farther he will be from this temper.

A religion that conſiſts in external and little things, doth moſt eaſily gain upon and poſſeſs the weakeſt minds, and whoever entertain it, it will enfeeble their ſpirits, and unfit them for the more generous and excellent duties of chriſtianity. We have but a finite heat, and zeal, and activity; and if we let out much of it upon ſmall things, there will be too little left for thoſe parts of religion which are of greateſt moment and concernment; if our heat evaporate in externals, the heart and vitals of religion will inſenſibly cool and decline.

How ſhould we bluſh, who are Chriſtians, that we have not learnt this eaſy truth from the goſpel, which even the light of nature taught the heathen; *Cultus autem*

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autem deorum eſt optimus itemque ſanctiſſimus atque caſtiſſimus, pleniſſimuſque pietatis, ut eos ſemper purâ, integrâ & incorruptâ mente & voce veneremur, Tully. "The beſt, the ſureſt, the moſt chaſte, and moſt "devout worſhip of the gods, is that which is paid "them with a pure, ſincere, and uncorrupt mind, "and words truly repreſenting the thoughts of the "heart." "*Compoſitum jus faſque animi,*" &c. "Serve GOD with a pure, honeſt, holy frame of "ſpirit, bring him a heart that is but generouſly ho-"neſt, and he will accept of the plaineſt ſacrifice."

And let me tell you, that the ceremonious worſhip of the Jews was never a thing in itſelf acceptable to GOD, or which he did delight in; and though GOD was pleaſed with their obedience to the ceremonial law after it was commanded, yet antecedently he did not deſire it; but that which our SAVIOUR ſaith concerning the law of divorce, is true likewiſe of the ceremonial, that it was permitted to the Jews "for the hardneſs of their hearts," and for their proneneſs to idolatry. GOD did not command it ſo much by way of approbation, as by way of condeſcenſion to their weakneſs; it was becauſe of "the hardneſs "of their carnal hearts" that GOD brought them under "the law of a carnal commandment," as the apoſtle calls it. See Pſal. li. 16, 17. Jer. vii. 21.

The reaſon why I have inſiſted ſo long upon this is, to let you underſtand what is the true nature of CHRIST's religion, and to abate the intemperate heat and zeal which men are apt to have for external and indifferent things in religion. The ſacrifices and rites of the Jews were very unagreeable and unſuitable to the nature of GOD, Pſal. l. 13. "will I "eat the fleſh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?" Spirits neither eat nor drink; it was a very unſuitable way of ſervice to kill oxen and ſheep for GOD; and

ıere is the ſame reaſon of all other rites, which SERM. CLIII.
natural neceſſity or decency doth not require.
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indifferent rites, that even the neceſſary exter-
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HRIST, are ſo far from being acceptable to GOD,
hey are abominable; nay, if they be uſed for
ık of ſin, or in oppoſition to real religion, and
a deſign to undermine it, GOD accounts ſuch
:e in the number of the moſt heinous ſins.
ɔu, who ſpend the ſtrength and vigour of your
s about external things, whoſe zeal for or a-
t ceremonies is ready to eat you up; you, who
and perſecute one another becauſe of theſe things,
break the neceſſary and indiſpenſable commands
ɔve, as an indifferent and unneceſſary ceremony,
ɔ and learn what that means, I will have mercy,
ıd not ſacrifice," which our SAVIOUR doth ſo
ı inculcate, and that Rom. xiv. 17. "The
ingdom of GOD is not meat and drink, &c."
l ſtudy the meaning of this, "GOD is a ſpirit,
nd they that worſhip him, muſt worſhip him in
ɔirit and in truth."

SERMON CLIV.

The immenſity of the divine nature.

PSAL. cxxxix. 7, 8, 9, 10.

Whither ſhall I go from thy ſpirit? or whither ſhall I flee from thy preſence? If I aſcend up into heaven, thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermoſt parts of the ſea, even there ſhall thy hand lead me, and thy right-hand ſhall hold me.

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THAT attribute of God which I laſt diſcourſed of is moſt abſolute, and declares his eſſence moſt immediately; "the ſpirituality of the di-"vine nature." I ſhall in the next place ſpeak of thoſe which relate to the manner of his being, immenſity and eternity, that is, the infiniteneſs of his eſſence, both in reſpect of ſpace and duration; that the divine nature hath no limits of it's being, nor bounds of it's duration. I ſhall at the preſent ſpeak to the firſt of theſe, his immenſity, and that from theſe words which I here read to you, "Whither "ſhall I go from thy ſpirit, &c." The meaning of which is this, that God is a ſpirit, infinitely diffuſing himſelf, preſent in all places, ſo that wherever I go, God is there: we cannot flee from his preſence. "If "I aſcend into heaven, he is there; if I go down "into the grave," the place of ſilence and obſcurity, "he is there;" (for that is the meaning of the expreſſion) "if I make my bed in hell, if I take the "wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermoſt

"part

" parts of the ſea, even there ſhall thy hand lead " me, and thy right hand ſhall hold me;" that is, if my motion ſhould be as ſwift as that of the light, which when the ſun riſeth darts itſelf in an inſtant from one part of the world to another, over the earth and the ſea, the remoteſt parts of the world which are unknown to us, yet would GOD be preſent to me in the motion, and all along as I go muſt I be led and upholden by him; ſo that all theſe expreſſions do but ſignify to us the immenſity of GOD's eſſence, that his being is infinitely diffuſed and preſent in all places. SERM. CLIV.

In ſpeaking to this attribute of GOD's immenſity, I ſhall firſt explain it to you a little.

Secondly, prove that it doth belong to him.

Thirdly, anſwer an objection or two that may be made againſt it.

Fourthly, draw ſome doctrinal inferences from it.

Fifthly, make ſome uſe and improvement of it.

Firſt, for the explication of it. By the immenſity of GOD, I mean, that his being hath no bounds or limits, but doth every way ſpread and diffuſe itſelf beyond what we can imagine; ſo that you cannot define the preſence of GOD by any certain place; ſo as to ſay, here he is, but not there; nor by any limits, ſo as to ſay, thus far his being reacheth, and no farther; but he is every where preſent after a moſt infinite manner, in the darkeſt corners and moſt private receſſes; the moſt ſecret cloſet that is in the whole world, the heart of man, darkneſs and privacy cannot keep him out; the preſence of another being, even of a body, which is the groſſeſt ſubſtance, doth not exclude him; the whole world doth not confine him; but he fills all the ſpace which we can imagine beyond this viſible world, and infinitely more than we can imagine.

Secondly, for the proof of it, I ſhall attempt it,

I. From the natural notions, and dictates of our minds.

II. From ſcripture and divine revelation.

III. From the inconvenience of the contrary.

1. From the natural notions and dictates of our minds. We find that the heathen, by the light of nature, did attribute this perfection to GOD. Tully tells us, De Nat. deor. that Pythagoras thought, *Deum eſſe animam per naturam rerum omnem intentum & commeantem*, "That GOD is as it were a ſoul "paſſing through and inſpiring all nature." And in l. 2. de leg. that this was Thales his opinion which he commends, *Homines exiſtimare oportere deos omnia cernere, deorum omnia eſſe plena*, "That "men ought to believe, that the gods ſee all things, "that all things are full of them." So Sen. epiſt. 95. *Ubique & omnibus præſto eſt.* "He is every "where preſent and at hand," & de Benef. l. 4. *Quocunque te flexeris, ibi illum videbis occurrentem tibi, nihil ab illo vacat, opus ſuum ipſe implet*; "Which way ſoever thou turneſt thyſelf, thou ſhalt "find him meeting thee, nothing is without him, "he fills his own work." Not much differing from the expreſſion of the Pſalmiſt here.

II. From ſcripture and divine revelation. I ſhall inſtance in ſome remarkable places; 1 Kings viii. 27. "Behold, the heaven, and heaven of hea-"vens cannot contain thee." Job xi. 7, 8, 9. "Canſt thou by ſearching find out GOD? canſt "thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?" Iſa. lxvi. 1. "Thus ſaith the LORD, behold, hea-"ven is my throne, and the earth is my foot-ſtool: "where is the houſe that ye build unto me? and "where is the place of my reſt?" Jer. xxiii. 23. 24. "Am I a GOD at hand, ſaith the LORD, and

"not

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" not a GOD afar off? Can any hide himſelf in ſe-
" cret places that I ſhall not ſee him, ſaith the LORD?
" do not I fill heaven and earth, ſaith the LORD?"
Amos ix. 2, 3. " Though they dig into hell, thence
" ſhall mine hand take them; though they climb
" up to heaven, thence will I bring them down.
" And though they hide themſelves in the top of
" Carmel, I will ſearch and take them out thence:
" and though they be hid from my ſight in the bot-
" tom of the ſea, thence will I command the ſerpent
" and he ſhall bite them." Acts xvii. 27, 28,
" Though he be not far from every one of us. For
" in him we live, and move, and have our being;
" as certain alſo ſome of your own poets have ſaid, for
" we are alſo his off-ſpring."

III. From the inconveniencies of the contrary. And this is the moſt proper way of proving any of GOD's perfections; for as I have told you formerly, there being nothing before GOD, nor any cauſe of his being, his perfections cannot be proved by way of demonſtration, but of conviction, by ſhewing the abſurdity of the contrary. The firſt and moſt eaſy notion that we have of GOD, is, that he is a being which hath all perfection, and is free from all imperfections; now if I prove that the immenſity of GOD's eſſence is a perfection, or which is the ſame, that the contrary is an imperfection, I do ſufficiently prove the thing intended.

Now to ſuppoſe the divine eſſence to be limited, or confined, and his preſence to be any where excluded, doth contradict both this neceſſary perfection of GOD, his univerſal providence; and the neceſſary duty of creatures, to worſhip and truſt in him; and the voluntary manifeſtation and appearance of GOD, in the incarnation of JESUS CHRIST.

1. It contradicts the univerſal providence of GOD.

infinite knowledge of all things, even those which are moſt ſecret and hidden, to be able all things, to ſteer and govern the actions creatures, and to have a perfect care of them to all the reaſon of mankind to require imm preſence.

2. It contradicts the neceſſary duty of th ture, which is to worſhip God, to depend him for every thing, and in every thing to a ledge him. Now all worſhip of God is r vain, or at leaſt uncertain, if God be not pr us to hear our prayers, to take notice of our and receive our acknowledgments: it will abate our confidence in God, and our fear to him, if we be uncertain whether he be preſe or not, whether he ſees our actions or not.

3. It contradicts a voluntary manifeſtation pearance of God in the incarnation of Chris that ſuppoſeth God not to be every where by his eſſence, muſt in all reaſon confine his p to heaven, and ſuppoſe him to be preſent el only by his virtue and power: but if this

There are two objections againſt this.

1. From reaſon.

2. From ſcripture.

1. Obj. Reaſon will be ready to ſuggeſt, that this is a diſparagement to the divine nature, to tie his preſence to this vile dunghil of the earth, and ſordid ſink of hell. This is a groſs apprehenſion of GOD, and a meaſuring of him by ourſelves. Indeed if we look upon GOD as capable of injury, and ſuffering, and offence, from the contagion of any thing here below, as we are, then indeed there were ſome ſtrength in this objection: but he is a bleſſed and pure being, *Mens ſegregata ab omni concretione mortali*, "A mind free from all mortal compoſition or mix-"ture;" Tully. Μηδενὶ παθητῷ συμπεπλεγμένον, "diſentangled from every thing paſſible;" as Plut. Thoſe things that are nauſeous to our ſenſes, do not affect him: darkneſs is uncomfortable to us, but "the darkneſs and the light are all one to him." Wickedneſs may "hurt a man," or "the ſon of "man;" but "if we multiply our tranſgreſſions, "we do nothing to GOD," as Elihu ſpeaks, Job xxxv. 6. Nothing can diſquiet or diſcompoſe his happy and bleſſed nature, but he converſeth here in this dark and troubled world with leſs danger or diſturbance, or any impure contagion, than the ſun-beams.

2. Object. Does not the ſcripture tell us, that "GOD ſits in the heavens, and "dwells on high," that "heaven is his throne," and that "it is the city "of the great GOD?" Doth not the LORD's prayer teach us to ſay, "Our father which art in heaven?" Is he not ſaid to "look down from heaven," and "to hear in heaven his dwelling-place?" Is it not ſaid, that "he doth not dwell in temples made with "hands?" And does not Solomon, 1 Kings viii.

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27. put it as a ſtrange queſtion, "will GOD indeed "dwell on the earth?" Is he not ſaid to come down and draw near to us, and to be afar off from us? Now how does this agree with his immenſity and omnipreſence?

For anſwer to this, I muſt diſtinguiſh the preſence of GOD. There is, 1ſt, his glorious preſence, that is, ſuch a preſence of GOD as is accompanied with an extraordinary manifeſtation of his glory, and that is eſpecially and chiefly confined to heaven, in reſpect of which it is called his ſeat, and throne, and "the habitation of his glory." Some degree of this was in the temple, which is the reaſon of Solomon's admiration, "will GOD indeed dwell on "earth?"

2dly, There is his gracious preſence, which diſcovers itſelf by miraculous effects of his favour, and goodneſs, and aſſiſtance, and thereby he is ſaid to "dwell in the hearts" of good men, and "with "them that are of an humble and contrite ſpirit," Iſa. lvii. 15. and in reſpect of this he is ſaid to "draw near to us," to "look down upon us;" and in reſpect of the abſence of this to be "far from "us."

3dly, There is his eſſential preſence, which is equally and alike in all places; and this is not excluded by thoſe former expreſſions which the ſcripture uſeth to denote to us the glorious and gracious preſence of GOD.

Fourthly, to make ſome inferences. I will mention only ſuch as the ſcripture here takes notice of, ſpeaking of GOD's immenſity.

1. Inf. That GOD is a ſpirit. This neceſſarily flows from his immenſity; for if the eſſence of GOD be every where diffuſed, the divine nature muſt be ſpiritual, otherwiſe it could not be in the ſame place

where body and matter is, but muſt be ſhut out of the world. But this I ſpoke more largely to, in my diſcourſe of GOD's being a ſpirit. This the Pſalmiſt obſerves here. "Where ſhall I go from thy ſpirit?" If he were not a ſpirit, we might "go from him," and "hide ourſelves from his preſence."

II. Inf. That GOD is incomprehenſible, that which is infinite cannot be meaſured and comprehended by that which is finite; and this alſo the Pſalmiſt takes notice of, in the verſe before my text, "Such "knowledge is too wonderful for me, it is high, I "cannot attain it."

III. Inf. That GOD is omniſcient, if GOD be every where, then he knows all things, yea even the hidden things of darkneſs, the ſecrets of our hearts; nothing can be hidden from an infinite eye; he is preſent to our thoughts, intimate to our hearts and reins; this the Pſalmiſt takes notice of, 1, 2, 3, 4, and 12 verſes.

IV. Inf. That GOD is omnipotent. "He can do "all things." Diſtance limits the power of creatures, and makes "their hands ſhort;" but GOD is every where, nothing is out of his reach; and this alſo the Pſalmiſt intimates in the text, v. 10. "Even "there ſhall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand "hold me."

Fifthly, the uſe and improvement I ſhall make of this, ſhall be,

1. To awaken our fear of him.

2. To encourage our faith and confidence in him.

1. To awaken our fear of him. The conſideration of GOD's preſence ſhould awaken in us a fear of reverence. The preſence of an earthly majeſty will awe our ſpirits, and compoſe us to reverence; yea the preſence of a wiſe and good man; how much more ſhould the preſence of the great, glorious, the wiſe, and the holy, and the juſt GOD ſtrik[illegible]

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upon our ſpirits? Where-ever we are God is with us, we always converſe with him, and live continually in his preſence; now a heathen could ſay, *cum Diis verecundè agendum*, "We muſt behave ourſelves "modeſtly becauſe we are in the preſence of God."

And it ſhould awaken in us a fear to offend God, and a fear of the divine diſpleaſure for having offended him. Fear is the moſt wakeful paſſion in the ſoul of man, and is the firſt principle that is wrought upon in us from the apprehenſions of a deity; it flows immediately from the principle of ſelf-preſervation which God hath planted in every man's nature; we have a natural dread and horror for every thing that can hurt us, and endanger our being or happineſs; now the greateſt danger is from the greateſt power, for where we are clearly over-matched, we cannot hope to make oppoſition nor reſiſtance with ſecurity and ſucceſs, to rebel with ſafety; now he that apprehends God to be near him, and preſent to him, believes ſuch a being to ſtand by him as is poſſeſt of an infinite and irreſiſtible power, and will vindicate all contempt of the divine majeſty, and violation of his laws. If we believe God to be always preſent with us, "Fear will continually take "hold of us," and we ſhall ſay of every place, as Jacob did of Bethel, "Surely God is in this place, "how dreadful is this place?" When we have at any time provoked God, if we believe the juſt God is at hand to revenge himſelf, and if we believe "the power of his anger," we ſhall ſay with David, Pſal. lxxvi. 7. "Thou, even thou, art to be feared, "and who may ſtand before thee when thou art "angry?" Pſal. cxix. 120. "My fleſh trembleth "becauſe of thee, and I am afraid of thy judgments." Sinners conſider this, "It is a fearful thing to "fall into the hands of the living God," and every time

time you ſin, you are within his reach. Let then the conſideration of God's preſence deter us from ſin, and quicken us to our duty. The eye and preſence of a ſuperior will lay a great reſtraint upon men; the eye of our prince, our maſter, or our father, will make us afraid or aſhamed to do any thing that is fooliſh or unſeemly: And will we do that under the eye of God, which we ſhould bluſh to do before a grave or a wiſe perſon, yea before a child or a fool? Did but men live under this apprehenſion, that God is preſent to them, that an holy and all-ſeeing eye beholds them, they would be afraid to do any thing that is vile and wicked to profane and pollute God's glorious name, by a trifling uſe of it in cuſtomary ſwearing and curſing. Whenever you ſin, you affront God to his face; and provoke omnipotent juſtice, which is at the door, and ready to break in upon you.

And the conſideration of this ſhould eſpecially deter us from ſecret ſins. This is the uſe the Pſalmiſt here makes of it. If we believe that "God ſearcheth "us and knows us, that he knows our down-ſitting, "and our up-riſing, and underſtands our thoughts "afar off, that he compaſſeth our path, and our "lying down, and is acquainted with all our ways, "that there is not a word in our tongue, but he "knows it altogether, that he hath beſet us behind "and before, that the darkneſs hideth not from him, "but the night ſhineth as the day, and the darkneſs and light are both alike;" I ſay, if we believe this, how ſhould we live in an awful ſenſe of the majeſty which is always above us, and before us, and about us, and within us, and is as inſeparable from us, as we are from ourſelves, whoſe eye is upon us from the beginning of our lives to the end of our days! did men believe that God is always with

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them, that his eye pierceth the darkneſs and ſees through all thoſe clouds with which they hide and muffle themſelves, and pries into the moſt ſecret receſſes of their hearts, how would this check and reſtrain them from "deviſing miſchief in their hearts, "or in their bed-chamber?" The holy preſence, and the pure eye of GOD would be to us a thouſand times more than to have our father, or our maſter, or our prince, or him whom we moſt revere, to ſtand by us. Did but men *repreſentare ſibi Deum*, "make "GOD preſent to them," by living under a continual ſenſe of his preſence, they would, as the expreſſion of the wiſe man is, "be in the fear of the LORD all "day." *Magna ſpes peccatorum tollitur, ſi peccaturis teſtis adſiſtat: aliquem habeat animus quem vereatur, cujus auctoritate etiam ſecretum ſuum ſanctius facit*; "The main hope of ſinners is to remain un-"diſcovered, let but ſomebody be privy to their "deſigns, and they are utterly diſappointed; it is "fit for the mind of a man to have an awe of ſome "being, whoſe authority may render even it's pri-"vacy more ſolemn." This is the character of wicked men, Pſal. lxxxvi. 14. "that they have not "GOD before their eyes." One great cauſe of all the wickedneſs, and violence, and looſeneſs that is upon the earth, is, they do not believe that GOD is near them, and ſtands by them.

And as the conſideration of GOD's preſence ſhould deter us from ſin, ſo it ſhould quicken and animate us to our duty. It is ordinarily a great encouragement to men to acquit themſelves handſomly, to have the eyes of men upon them, eſpecially of thoſe whoſe applauſe and approbation they value. GOD alone is *amplum theatrum*, he is a greater theatre than the world, and it ſhould be more to us that he ſtands by us, than if the eyes of all the world were fixed upon us.

Seneca

Seneca adviſeth it as an excellent means to promote virtue, to propound to ourſelves, and ſet before our eyes ſome eminently virtuous perſon, as Cato or Lælius, *ut ſic tanquam illo ſpectante vivamus, & omnia tanquam illo videnti faciamus:* That we "may live juſt as if he were looking upon us, and "do all things juſt as if he beheld us." How much greater incitement will it be to us, to think that GOD looks upon us, and ſees us, and really ſtands by us, than faintly to imagine the preſence of Lælius or Cato? SERM. CLIV.

This ſhould have an influence upon all the duties we perform, and the manner of performing them, that we do it to him who ſtands by us, and is familiarly acquainted with us, and is more intimate to us than we are to ourſelves. This Cic. in l. 2. de leg. looks upon as a great principle of religion, *ſit igitur hoc perſuaſum civibus, & qualis quiſque ſit, quid agat, quid in ſe admittat, quâ mente, quâ pietate religiones colat, deos intueri, & piorum impiorumque rationem habere:* Let men be thoroughly perſuaded of this, "that the gods obſerve, both the diſpoſition and "the actions of every particular man, what he con-"ſents to, what he allows himſelf in, particularly "with what meaning, with what degree of inward "devotion he performs his religious worſhip; and "that they diſtinguiſh between the pious and the "impious."

2. To encourage our faith and confidence in him. When we are in ſtraits, and difficulties, and dangers, GOD is with us; when trouble is near to us, GOD is not far from us; where-ever we are, how remote ſoever from friends and companions, we cannot be baniſhed from GOD's preſence; if we dwell "be-"yond the utmoſt parts of the ſea, there his hand "leads us, and his right-hand holds us. Pſal. xvi.

"8. I

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" 8. I have ſet the LORD always before me; be-
" cauſe he is at my right-hand, I ſhall not be mov-
ed." The conſideration of GOD's preſence is the great ſtay and ſupport of our faith, Pſal. xlvi. 1, 2. " GOD is our refuge and ſtrength, a very preſent " help in trouble; therefore will not we fear though " the earth be removed, and though the mountains " be carried into the midſt of the ſea." In the greateſt commotions, and the moſt eminent and threatening dangers, this ſhould charm and allay our fears, that " GOD is a preſent help."

This was the ſupport of Moſes his faith in his ſufferings, as the apoſtle tells us, Heb. xi. 27. " He " endured, as ſeeing him who is inviſible."

To conclude all, whenever we are under any preſſure or trouble, we ſhould rebuke our own fears, and challenge our anxious thoughts, with David, Pſal. xlii. 11. " Why art thou caſt down, O my ſoul? " and why art thou ſo diſquieted within me? truſt " ſtill in GOD;" believe that GOD is with thee, and that omnipotent goodneſs ſtands by thee, who can and will ſupport thee, and relieve thee, and deliver thee when it ſeems beſt to his wiſdom.

SERMON CLV.

The eternity of GOD.

PSAL. xc. 2.

Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadſt formed the earth and the world, even from everlaſting to everlaſting thou art GOD.

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THE immenſity and eternity of GOD are thoſe attributes which relate to his nature, or manner of being. Having ſpoken of the former, I proceed to conſider the latter, from theſe words.

The

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The title of this Pſalm is the "prayer of Moſes, "the man of God." He begins his prayer with the acknowledgment of God's providence to his people from the beginning of the world; LORD, thou "haſt been our dwelling place from all generations; "in generation and generation;" ſo the Hebrew. He was well acquainted with the hiſtory of the world, and the providence of God from the beginning of it, and as if he had ſpoken too little of God, in ſaying, that his providence had been exerciſed in all the ages of the world, he tells us here in the text, that he was before the world, and he made it, he was from all eternity, and ſhould continue to all eternity the ſame. "Before the mountains were brought "forth;" the moſt firm and durable parts of the world; the moſt eminent and conſpicuous; "or "ever thou hadſt formed the earth and the world;" before any thing was created; "from everlaſting to "everlaſting thou art God." In ſpeaking of this attribute, I ſhall

Firſt, give you the explication of it.

Secondly, endeavour to prove that it doth belong to God, and ought to be attributed to the divine nature.

Thirdly, Draw ſome corollaries from the whole.

Firſt, for the explication of it. Eternity is a duration without bounds or limits: now there are two limits of duration, beginning and ending; that which hath always been is without beginning; that which always ſhall be is without ending. Now we may conceive of a thing always to have been, and the continuance of it's being now to ceaſe, though there be no ſuch thing in the world: and there are ſome things which have had a beginning of their being, but ſhall have no end, ſhall always continue, as the angels, and ſpirits of men. The firſt of theſe the

ſchoolmen

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ſchoolmen call eternity *à parte ante*, that is, duration without beginning; this latter eternity *à parte poſt*, a duration without ending: But eternity abſolutely taken comprehends both theſe, and ſignifies an infinite duration which had no beginning, nor ſhall have any end: ſo that when we ſay GOD is eternal, we mean, that he always was and ſhall be for ever; that he had no beginning of life, nor ſhall have any end of days; but that, "he is from everlaſting to "everlaſting," as it is here in the text.

It is true indeed, that as to GOD's eternity *a parte ante*, as to his having always been, the ſcripture doth not give us any ſolicitous account of it; it only tells us in general, that GOD was "before the world "was," and that "he created it;" it doth not deſcend to gratify our curioſity, in giving us any account of what GOD did before he made the world, or how he entertained himſelf from all eternity; it doth not give us any diſtinct account of his infinite duration; for that had been impoſſible for our finite underſtandings to comprehend; if we ſhould have aſcended upward millions of ages, yet we ſhould never have aſcended to the top, never have arrived at the beginning of infinity; therefore the ſcripture, which was wrote to inſtruct us in what was neceſſary, and not to ſatisfy our curioſity, tells us this, that GOD was "from everlaſting, before the "world was made, and that he laid the foundations "of it."

So that by the eternity of GOD you are to underſtand "the perpetual continuance of his being, "without beginning or ending."

I ſhall not trouble you with the inconſiſtent and unintelligible notions of the ſchooolmen; that it is *duratio tota ſimul*, in which we are not to conceive any ſucceſſion, but to imagine it an inſtant. We

may

ay as well conceive the immenſity of GOD to be a point, as his eternity to be an inſtant: and as according to our manner of conceiving, we muſt neceſſarily ſuppoſe the immenſity of GOD to be an infinite panſion of his eſſence, a preſence of it to all places, id imaginable ſpace; ſo muſt we ſuppoſe the eterty of GOD to be a perpetual continuance, co-extent to all imaginable ſucceſſion of ages. Now how at can be together, which muſt neceſſarily be imaned to be co-exiſtent to ſucceſſions, let them that an conceive. SERM. CLV.

Secondly, For the proof of this, I ſhall attempt two ways.

I. From the dictates of natural light and reaſon.

II. From ſcripture and divine revelation.

I. From the dictates of natural reaſon. This attribute of GOD is of all other leaſt diſputed among ne philoſophers; indeed all agree that GOD is a erfect and happy being, but wherein that happineſs nd perfection conſiſts, they differ exceedingly; but ll agree that GOD is eternal, and are agreed what eterity is, viz. "a boundleſs duration:" and however they did attribute a beginning to their heroes nd demons, whence come the genealogies of their ods; yet the ſupreme GOD they looked upon as ithout beginning: and it is a good evidence, that his perfection doth clearly belong to GOD, that Epiurus, who had the loweſt and meaneſt conceptions f GOD, and robbed him of as many perfections as is imperfect reaſon would let him, yet is forced to ttribute this to him. Tully de Nat. Deor. lib. 1. aith to the Epicureans, *ubi igitur veſtrum beatum & æternum quibus duobus verbis ſignificatis Deum?* "where then is your happy and eternal being, by "which two epithets you expreſs GOD?" And Lucretius, who hath undertaken to repreſent to the

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Omnis enim per ſe divûm natura neceſſe eſt,
Immortali ævo ſumma cum pace fruatur.

"It is abſolutely neceſſary to the nature of the gods, "to paſs an eternity in profound peace and quiet."

The poets, who had the wildeſt notions of GOD, yet they conſtantly give them the title of ἀθάνατοι; the heathen never mention the name of GOD, without this attribute, *dii immortales!* immortal gods! was their ordinary exclamation; and they ſwear conſtantly by this attribute, *deos teſtor immortales*; and to mention no more, Tully ſaith expreſly, *Nos Deum niſi ſempiternum intelligere qui poſſumus?* "How can we conceive of GOD, but as an eternal "being?"

Now the reaſon of this is evident, becauſe it would be the greateſt imperfection we could attribute to his being; and the more perfect his being were otherwiſe, the greater imperfection would it be for ſuch a being to die; ſo excellent a nature to ceaſe to be; it would be an infinite abaſement to all his other perfections; his power, and wiſdom, and goodneſs, that theſe ſhould all be periſhing. Nay it would hinder ſeveral of his perfections, and contradict their very being: his ſelf-exiſtence; had he not always been, he had not been of himſelf; his neceſſary exiſtence; for that is not neceſſarily, which may at any time not be, or ceaſe to be what it is; and it would much abate the duty of the creature; we could not have that aſſurance of his promiſe, and that ſecurity of the recompence of the next life, if the continuance of his being, who ſhould be the diſpenſer of them, were uncertain.

Now theſe abſurdities and inconveniencies follow-

in

ing from the denial of this perfection to GOD, is ſufficient evidence that it belongs to him; for I told you the perfections of GOD cannot be proved by way of demonſtration, but only by way of conviction, by ſhewing the abſurdity of the contrary. SERM. CLV.

II. From ſcripture and divine revelation. There are innumerable places to this purpoſe which ſpeak of the eternity of GOD directly, and by conſequence: by conſequence thoſe words 2 Pet. iii. 8. "One "day with the LORD is as a thouſand years, and "a thouſand years as one day;" which words, however interpreters have troubled themſelves about them, being afraid of a contradiction in them, yet the plain meaning of them is this, that ſuch is the infinite duration of GOD, that all meaſures of time bear no proportion to it; for that this is the plain meaning, appears by the xcth Pſalm, out of which they are cited, "for a thouſand years in thy ſight "are but as yeſterday, when it is paſt, and as a "watch in the night;" that is as, the time paſt, as a few hours ſlept away, for that is the meaning of "a watch in the night;" that is, as nothing. Now St. Peter's converſion of the words, "one day is "as a thouſand years, and a thouſand years as one "day," only ſignifies this, that the longeſt duration of time is ſo inconſiderable to GOD, that it is as the ſhorteſt, that is, bears no proportion to the eternity of GOD.

But directly, the ſcripture frequently mentions this attribute: he is called the "everlaſting GOD," Geni. xxi. 33. "The eternal GOD," Deut. xxxiii. 27. and which is to the ſame purpoſe, "he that "inhabiteth eternity," Iſa. lvii. 15. And this as it is attributed to him in reſpect of his being, ſo in reſpect of all his other perfections, Pſal. ciii. 17. "The mercy of the LORD is from everlaſting to

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" everlaſting." Rom. i. 20. " his eternal power." 1 Tim. i. 17. " The king eternal." Thoſe doxologies which the ſcripture uſeth are but acknowledgments of this attribute. " Bleſſed be the LORD " for ever and ever," Neh. ix. 5. " To whom be " glory, and honour, and dominion, for ever and " ever," Gal. i. 5. and in many other places.

Hither we may refer all thoſe places which ſpeak of him as without beginning, Pſal. xciii. 2. " Thou " art from everlaſting," Mich. v. 2. " Whoſe goings forth have been from everlaſting." Hab. i. 12. " Art not thou from everlaſting, O LORD!" And thoſe which ſpeak of the perpetual continuance of his duration; Pſal. cii. 24, 25, 26, 27. " Thy " years are throughout all generations; of old thou " haſt laid the foundations of the earth, and the " heavens are the work of thy hands; they ſhall " periſh, but thou ſhalt endure; yea all of them " ſhall wax old like a garment, and as a veſture " ſhalt thou change them, and they ſhall be changed; but thou art the ſame, and thy years ſhall " have no end."

And thoſe which ſpeak of him as the firſt and the laſt; Iſa. xliii. 10. " Before me there was no " GOD formed, neither ſhall there be any after me. " I am the firſt, and I am the laſt, and beſides me " there is no GOD." And to mention no more, thoſe which ſpeak of his being, as co exiſtent to all difference of time, paſt, preſent and to come, Rev. i. 8. " I am alpha, and omega, the beginning, and " the ending, ſaith the LORD, which is, and which " was, and which is to come."

Thirdly, I ſhall from hence draw,

I. Some doctrinal corollaries.

II. Some practical inferences.

I. Doctrinal corollaries, that you may ſee how the

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the perfections of GOD depend one upon another, and may be deduced one from another.

1. Corol. From the eternity of GOD we may infer that he is of himſelf. That which always is, can have nothing before it to be a cauſe of it's being.

2. Corol. We may hence infer the neceſſity of his being. It is neceſſary every thing ſhould be, when it is; now that which is always is abſolutely neceſſary, becauſe always ſo.

3. Corol. The immutability of the divine nature; for being always, he is neceſſarily, and being neceſſarily, he cannot but be what he is; a change of his being is as impoſſible as a ceſſation. Therefore the Pſalmiſt puts his immutability and eternity together. Pſal. cii. 27. "But thou art the ſame, and thy "years ſhall have no end."

II. By way of practical inference or application.

1. The conſideration of GOD's eternity may ſerve for the ſupport of our faith. This Moſes here uſeth as a ground of his faith; "LORD, thou haſt been "our dwelling-place, in all generations, before the "mountains were brought forth," &c. Pſal. lxii. 8. "Truſt in him at all times, ye people." His immenſity is an argument why all ſhould truſt in him, he is a preſent help to all; and why they ſhould truſt in him at all times, his eternity is an argument, Deut. xxxiii. 27. "The eternal GOD "is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlaſting "arms." There are two attributes which are the proper objects of our faith and confidence, GOD's goodneſs, and his power, both theſe are eternal; "The goodneſs of the LORD endureth for ever," as it is frequently in the Pſalms: and his power is eternal; the apoſtle ſpeaks of his eternal power, as well as godhead; Rom. i. 20. Iſa. xxvi. 4. "Truſt ye in the LORD for ever, for in the LORD

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" Jehovah is everlaſting ſtrength." Iſa. xl. 28. " The everlaſting GOD, the LORD, the Creator of " the ends of the earth fainteth not, neither is " weary."

We cannot truſt in men, becauſe there is nothing in man to be a foundation of our confidence; his good will towards us may change, his power may faint, and he may grow weary; or if theſe continue, yet they that have a mind and a power to help us, themſelves may fail; therefore the Pſalmiſt uſeth this conſideration of mens mortality, to take us off from confidence in man, Pſal. cxlvi. 3, 4. " Put not your truſt in princes, nor in the ſon of " man, in whom there is no help; his breath go- " eth forth, he returneth to his earth, in that very " day his thoughts periſh." Iſa. ii. 22. " Ceaſe ye " from man, whoſe breath is in his noſtrils; for " wherein is he to be accounted of?" The greateſt of the ſons of men are but " lying refuges to the " everlaſting GOD;" they are but " broken reeds " to the rock of ages."

And this may ſupport our faith, not only in reference to our own condition for the future, but in reference to our poſterity, and the condition of GOD's church to the end of the world. When we die we may leave ours and the church in his hands, who lives for ever, and reigns for ever. The enemies of GOD's church, and thoſe who have the moſt malicious deſigns againſt it, whatever ſhare they may have in the affairs of the world, they can but domineer for a while, they muſt " die, and that very " day their thoughts periſh: but thy throne, O " GOD, is for ever and ever."

2. For the encouragement of our obedience. We ſerve the GOD who can give us an everlaſting reward. The reward of the next life is called " eternal life, " an

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"an eternal weight of glory," 2 Cor. iv. 17. "Eternal ſalvation," Heb. v. 9. "An eternal in-"heritance," Heb. ix. 15. That place where good men ſhall be rewarded is called, "Everlaſting habi-"tations," Luke xvi. 9. "A houſe eternal in the "heavens," 2 Cor. v. 1. As the promiſe of our future reward is founded in the goodneſs of GOD, and the greatneſs of it in his power, ſo the duration of it in his eternity. Now what an encouragement is this to us, that we ſerve him and ſuffer for him who lives for ever, and will make us happy for ever? When we ſerve the great men of this world, though we be ſecure of their affection, yet we are uncertain of their lives; and this diſcourageth many, and makes men worſhip the riſing ſun, and many times takes off mens eyes from the king, to his ſucceſſor: but he that ſerves GOD, ſerves "the king everlaſting," as the apoſtle calls him, who will live to diſpenſe rewards to all thoſe who are faithful to him.

3. For the terror of wicked men. The ſentence which ſhall be paſt upon men at the day of judgment, is called "Eternal judgment," Heb. vi. 2. becauſe it decides mens eternal ſtate; the puniſhment that ſhall follow this ſentence, which ſhall paſs upon the wicked, is called, "Everlaſting puniſhment," Matth. xxv. 46. "Everlaſting fire," Matth. xxv. 41. "Everlaſting deſtruction," 2 Theſſ. i. 9. "The vengeance of eternal fire," Jude 7. "The "ſmoke of the bottomleſs pit," is ſaid, "to a-"ſcend for ever and ever," Rev. xiv. 11. and the wicked "to be tormented day and night, for ever "and ever," Rev. xx. 10. Now as the puniſhment of wicked men is founded in the juſtice of GOD; and the greatneſs of it in his power; ſo the perpetuity and continuance of it in his eternity. The

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apoſtle ſaith, Heb. x. 31. "It is a fearful thing to "fall into the hands of the living GOD;" becauſe he that "lives for ever can puniſh for ever;" as the eternal demerit of ſin feeds and animates, and keeps alive the never dying worm, ſo the wrath of the eternal GOD blows up the eternal flame.

How ſhould this awaken in us a fear of the eternal GOD! Sinners, what a folly is it, for "the "pleaſures of ſin, which are but for a ſeaſon," to incenſe that juſtice which will puniſh and torment you for ever! As good men ſhall have the everlaſting GOD for their reward, and their happineſs; ſo wicked men ſhall have him for their judge and avenger.

We fear the wrath of men, whoſe power is ſhort, and "whoſe breath is in their noſtrils," who can afflict but a little, and for a little while. Doſt thou fear "man that ſhall die, and the ſon of man that "ſhall be made as graſs?" and is not the wrath of the eternal GOD much more terrible? Luke xii. 4, 5. "And I ſay unto you, my friends, be not afraid "of them that kill the body, and after that have "no more that they can do: but I will forewarn "you whom ye ſhall fear; fear him, who after he "hath killed, hath power to caſt into hell, yea, I "ſay unto you, fear him." The wrath of man is deſpicable, becauſe it hath bounds and limits; the fury of man can but reach to the body, it can go no farther; it expires with this life; it cannot follow us beyond the grave: but the wrath of the eternal GOD doth not only reach the body, but the ſoul; it is not confined to this life, but purſues us to the other world, and extends itſelf to all eternity.

"Fear him, who after he hath killed, hath pow-"er to caſt into hell," that is, to inflict eternal torments; "yea, I ſay unto you, fear him."

SER-

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The incomprehenſibleneſs of God.

JOB xi. 7.

Canſt thou by ſearching find out God? *Canſt thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?*

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IN treating of the properties and perfections of God, I ſhall at preſent conſider that which reſults from the infinite excellency of his nature and perfection, compared with the imperfection of our underſtandings, which is commonly called, the incomprehenſibleneſs of God. This you have expreſſed here in the words of Zophar, "Canſt thou "by ſearching find out God?" &c.

There is no great difficulty in the words; "Canſt "thou by ſearching find out God," *poteſne perveſtigare intima Dei*, ſo Caſtalio tranſlates it. Doſt thou know God intimately, and thoroughly within and without? Canſt thou pierce into the centre of his perfections, and dive into the bottom of them? And, "Canſt thou find out the Almighty to perfection?" Canſt thou find out the Almighty, *uſque ad ultima*, to the very laſt and utmoſt of him? ſo as thou canſt ſay after a thorough ſearch and enquiry, there is no perfection in God beyond this, there is nothing of him now that remains to be known; this he is, and no other; that he is, and no otherwiſe; this he can do, and no more; hither doth his knowledge, and power, and wiſdom reach, and no farther.

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" Canſt thou do this ?" Theſe interrogations have the force of a vehement negation; as if he had ſaid, " No, thou canſt not; GOD is unſearchable, he is " incomprehenſible."

The two queſtions in the text ſeem to be only two ſeveral expreſſions of the ſame thing. The firſt queſtion is undoubtedly general, concerning the nature and perfections of GOD in general; " Canſt " thou by ſearching find out GOD ?" Canſt thou by the moſt diligent ſearch and enquiry come to a perfect knowledge and underſtanding of him ?

The ſecond queſtion may ſeem to be a particular inſtance to the general truth implied in the firſt queſtion; he ſeems to inſtance in his power; as if he had ſaid, " GOD is unſearchable," and then had inſtanced in a particular perfection, " the power of " GOD, canſt thou by ſearching find out GOD ?" Thou canſt not comprehend the divine nature and perfections in general; " Canſt thou find out the Almighty unto perfection ?" Conſider particularly his power, and ſee if thou canſt know the utmoſt of that. But I rather think, that the latter queſtion is altogether the ſame in ſenſe with the former; and that the attribute of Almighty, which is here given to GOD, is uſed by way of deſcription, and not intended by way of inſtance. " Canſt thou find out " the Almighty," that is, GOD, " unto perfection ?" Which way ſoever we take the words, it is not much material; we may ground this obſervation upon them:

That GOD is incomprehenſible.

This term or attribute is a relative term, and ſpeaks a relation between an object and a faculty, between GOD and a created underſtanding; ſo that the meaning of it is plainly this, that no created underſtanding can comprehend GOD, that is, have a perfect and exact

exact knowledge of him, ſuch a knowledge as is adequate to the perfection of the object. Or thus, the nature and perfections of GOD are above the underſtanding of any of his creatures; it is only his own infinite underſtanding that can frame a perfect idea of his own perfection. GOD knows himſelf, his own underſtanding comprehends his own perfections: but he is "incomprehenſible to his creatures." SERM. CLVI.

Indeed, there is nothing more obvious than GOD; for "he is not far from every one of us; in him we "live, and move, and have our being;" there needs no great ſearch to find out there is a GOD; "an eternal power and deity are clearly ſeen in the "things which are made," as the apoſtle tells us; but the manner of the being, and properties, and perfections of this GOD, theſe cannot be comprehended by a finite underſtanding. I ſhall prove the doctrine, and then apply it.

Firſt, For the proof of it. I will attempt it theſe three ways.

I. By way of inſtance, or induction of particulars.

II. By way of conviction.

III. By giving the clear reaſon of it.

I. By way of inſtance. And I ſhall give you inſtances both on the part of the object, and of the ſubject; or the perſons who are capable of knowing GOD in any degree.

1. On the part of the object. The nature of GOD, the excellency and perfection of GOD, the works and ways of GOD are above our thoughts and apprehenſions. The nature of GOD; it is vaſt and infinite, Job xxxvi. 26. "GOD is great, and we know him "not." Job xxxvii. 23. "Touching the Almighty, we cannot find him out." Pſal. cxlv. 3. "His "greatneſs is unſearchable."

The excellencies and perfections of GOD; his immenſity,

menſity, 2 Chron. ii. 6. "The heaven of heavens "cannot contain him:" The eternity of his duration, "from everlaſting to everlaſting he is GOD." We cannot imagine any limits of his preſence, nor bounds of his duration: the infiniteneſs of his knowledge, Pſal cxlvii. 5. "His underſtanding is infinite." When we think of the wiſdom and knowledge of GOD, our beſt way is to fall into admiration, Rom. xi. 35. "O the depth of the riches both "of the wiſdom and knowledge of GOD!"

Whereas the ſcripture ſpeaks of thoſe perfections of GOD, which the creatures do in ſome meaſure and degree partake of, as his goodneſs, and power, and wiſdom and holineſs and immortality, it attributes them in ſuch a peculiar and divine manner to GOD, as doth exclude and ſhut out the creature from any claim or ſhare or title to them, Matt. xix. 16, 17. "Why calleſt thou me good; there is none good "but one, that is GOD." 1 Tim. vi. 15, 16. "Who is the bleſſed and only potentate, who only "hath immortality." 1 Tim. i. 17. "The only "wiſe GOD," Rev. xv. 4. "For thou only art "holy." In ſo inconceiveable a manner doth GOD poſſeſs theſe perfections which he communicates, and we can only underſtand them as he communicates them, and not as he poſſeſſes them; ſo that when we conſider any of theſe divine perfections, we muſt not frame notions of them contrary to what they are in the creature, nor muſt we limit them by what they are in the creature, but ſay the goodneſs and the wiſdom of GOD are all this which is in the creature, and much more which I am not able to comprehend; the tranſcendent degree, and the ſingularity of theſe divine perfections, which are communicable, is beyond what we are able to conceive.

The works of GOD, they are likewiſe unſearch-

able;

able; the works of creation and of redemption. SERM. CLVI.
Job v. 9. "Which doth great things, and un-
"ſearchable, marvellous things, paſt finding out:"
and then he inſtanceth in the works of GOD, Job
xxvi. 14. "Lo, theſe are part of his ways: But
"how little a portion is heard of him? and the
"thunder of his voice who can underſtand?" So
that he tells us expreſly, we cannot find out the
works of GOD, we do but know part of them. The
queſtion which he puts, Job xxxvii. 16. "Doſt
"thou know the wondrous works of him that is
"perfect in knowledge?" can only be anſwered by
the words of the Pſalmiſt, Pſal. civ. 24. "O
"LORD, how wonderful are thy works! in wiſ-
"dom haſt thou made them all." The work of
redemption; in this there ſhines forth ſuch wiſdom,
mercy, and love, as our underſtandings cannot reach;
this work is called "the wiſdom of GOD in a my-
"ſtery," hidden wiſdom, σοφία ἀπεκεκρυμμένη, 1 Cor.
ii. 7. The mercy, and grace, and love of it is call-
ed, "The riches of GOD's mercy, the exceed-
"ing riches of his grace," Eph. ii. 4, 7. Now
riches is when you cannot tell the utmoſt of them,
pauperis eſt numerare. Eph. iii. 18, 19. "That
"ye may be able to comprehend with all ſaints, what
"is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height,
"and to know the love of CHRIST, which paſſeth
"knowledge." When we have the largeſt appre-
henſions of this love, ſo that we think we compre-
hend it and know it, "it paſſeth knowledge;" yea,
the effects of GOD's power and love, which he mani-
feſts in believers, are unſpeakable; for "he is able to
"do for us exceeding abundantly above what we
"can aſk or think, according to the power which
"worketh in us," Eph. iii. 20. The peace which
guards their ſouls "paſſeth all underſtanding," Phil.

iv. 7.

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iv. 7. Thoſe joys which fill their hearts are not to be expreſſed; 1 Pet. i. 8. we read of "joy "unſpeakable and full of glory." The happineſs which they hope for is inconceiveable; it is that which "eye hath not ſeen, nor ear heard, nor hath "entered into the heart of man, which GOD hath "laid up for us."

The ways of GOD's providence, they are not to be traced, Pſal. lxxvii. 19. "Thy way is in the ſea, and "thy paths in the great waters, and thy footſteps "are not known." Eccleſ. iii. 11. "No man "can find out the work that GOD maketh from "the beginning to the end." We are but of yeſterday, and know nothing. When we look upon GOD's providence, we take a part from the whole, and conſider it by itſelf, without relation to the whole ſeries of his diſpenſation; we cannot ſee the whole of GOD's providence at one view, and never ſee from the beginning of the works of GOD to the end; therefore our knowledge of them muſt needs be very imperfect, and full of miſtakes, and falſe judgments of things; we cannot, by our petty and ſhort-ſighted deſigns, judge of the works of GOD, and the deſigns of providence; for "our ways are not as "his ways, nor our thoughts as his thoughts; but "as the heavens are high above the earth, ſo are his "ways above our ways, and his thoughts above our "thoughts," Iſa. lv. 8, 9. The ways of GOD's mercy, Pſal. ciii. "As the heavens are high above "the earth, ſo great is GOD's mercy." Pſal. cxxxix. 17, 18. "How precious are thy thoughts unto me? "how great is the ſum of them? If I ſhould count "them, they are more in number than the ſand." And the ways of GOD's judgments; the ſeverity and greatneſs of his judgment is not known, Pſal. xc. "Who knoweth the power of thine anger? And

"who

" who may ſtand before thee when thou art angry?" And the reaſons of his judgments are unſearchable, Pſal. xxxvi. 6. " Thy judgments are a great deep." Rom. xi. 33. " How unſearchable are his judg- " ments, and his ways paſt finding out!" Theſe are the inſtances on the part of the object. SERM. CLVI.

2. On the part of the ſubject, or the perſons capable of knowing GOD in any meaſure. The perfect knowledge of GOD is above a finite creature's underſtanding. Wicked men are ignorant of GOD, and full of falſe apprehenſions of him; the ſcripture gives this deſcription of them; they are thoſe that " know not GOD," 2 Theſſ. i. 7. Wicked men are ſo far from knowing GOD to perfection, that they have hardly any true knowledge of him; for as the man himſelf is, ſo will GOD ſeem to be to him; the idea and notions which men have of GOD, is but the picture of their own complexion. To a true knowledge there is required likeneſs; a man's mind muſt be like the thing he would underſtand; therefore the apoſtle tells us, " the natural," or " animal man, doth not receive the things of GOD," he is not capable of them, becauſe his mind is unſuitable to them, he is πλήρης τοῦ σώματος, full of body, and he cannot reliſh ſpiritual things; even thoſe natural notions which wicked men have of GOD, are ſtrangely tinctured and obſcured by the temper of the man; they are *lux ſepulta in opacâ materiâ*, light buried and hid in matter and darkneſs, in the blackneſs of a foul and impure heart; ſo that there is no queſtion of them, whether they comprehend GOD or not.

But good men " cannot find out GOD," they have ſome falſe apprehenſions of him; all their apprehenſions are dark, have much of obſcurity in them; they know GOD to ſalvation, but not to per-

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fection; in this life we do but know GOD in part, that is, in compariſon of the knowledge which our natures are capable of.

But I will inſtance yet higher; the angels and the ſpirits of juſt men made perfect, though they have true apprehenſions of GOD, yet they do not arrive to perfect knowledge of him, they cannot *perveſtigare ultima*, know the utmoſt of GOD; the cherubims themſelves are continually looking at the mercy ſeat. To which the apoſtle alludes, 1 Pet. i. 12. when he tells us the myſtery of GOD's mercy in the goſpel was a thing which the angels deſired to pry into. In heaven "that which is in part ſhall be done away," that is, our knowledge ſhall be as perfect as our natures are capable; but it ſhall be finite. When we ſhall "ſee "GOD face to face," that is, have an immediate viſion of him, "and ſee him as he is," that is, not having our underſtandings tinctured by any luſt or paſſion that may darken our minds, or miſrepreſent the object; for the apoſtle tells us, "we ſhall ſee him, be- "cauſe we ſhall be like him;" yet then we ſhall have ſhort and unadequate apprehenſions of him, we ſhall ſtill retain our limited natures and finite underſtandings.

II. By way of conviction. Doſt thou know perfectly the nature of a finite ſpirit, the perfection and the power of an angel, how being immaterial they can act upon matter, and move that which can make no reſiſtance to a ſpirit? Doſt thou know how they can move themſelves to a great diſtance in a moment, and dart themſelves from one part of the world to another? Doſt thou know how man is "formed in "the loweſt parts of the earth," as the Pſalmiſt expreſſeth it; and the curious frame of our bodies is wrought from ſuch rude principles in ſo dark a ſhop? Canſt thou give an account how the ſoul is united to

the

the body, by what bands or holds a ſpirit is ſo cloſely and intimately conjoined to matter? Doſt thou know how thy ſelf underſtandeſt any thing, and canſt retain the diſtinct ideas and notions of ſo many objects without confuſion? Doſt thou know the leaſt parts of matter, how they are knit together; and by what cement they cleave ſo faſt to one another, that they can hardly be ſeparated?

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Now if the creatures be ſo unſearchable, and the knowledge of theſe be too hard for thee; is not the creator of them much more incomprehenſible, who poſſeſſeth all theſe perfections which he communicates, and many which cannot be communicated to a creature? If in natural and ſenſible things, *maxima pars eorum quæ ſcimus, eſt minima pars eorum quæ neſcimus*; how much more is it true of GOD, that our ignorance is more than our knowledge; when the whole earth and all the creatures bear no proportion to him? Iſa. xl. 15, 17. "Behold all the nations "of the earth are as the drop of the bucket, and as "the ſmall duſt of the balance; all nations before "him are nothing, and are accounted to him leſs "than nothing."

III. By ſhewing you the clear reaſon of it, which is this, the diſproportion between the faculty and the object, the finiteneſs of our underſtandings, and the infiniteneſs of the divine nature and perfections. "GOD is greater than our hearts," and therefore as he knows more than we do, as the apoſtle reaſons, 1 John iii. 20. ſo he is more than can be known by us; he is too vaſt an object for our underſtanding to entertain, for our minds to receive. Thou may'ſt as well mete out the heaven with a ſpan, and meaſure the waters in the hollow of thy hand, and comprehend the duſt of the earth in a little urn, and weigh the mountains in ſcales, and the hills in a little balance,

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as think to circumſcribe GOD in the narrow limits of thy thoughts, or to bring that which is infinite within the compaſs of that which is finite.

And there is not only the vaſtneſs and greatneſs of the object; but the glory and reſplendency of it, does ſo dazzle our ſight, that we cannot perfectly ſee it, 2 Tim. vi. 16. "He dwelleth in light which no man "can approach unto, whom no man hath ſeen, nor "can ſee." As GOD is too big, ſo he is too bright an object for our underſtandings; the preſence of his glory over-powers our minds, and bears down our faculties, and conquers our underſtandings.

I come now to apply this doctrine of the incomprehenſibleneſs of the divine nature. If the nature, and perfections, and ways, and works of GOD be incomprehenſible, and paſt finding out;

I. It calls for our admiration, and veneration, and reverence. Theſe are the beſt apprehenſions of him that is incomprehenſible; a ſilent veneration of his excellencies, is the beſt acknowledgment of them. We muſt admire what we cannot apprehend or expreſs, Zach. ix. 17. "How great is his goodneſs, "and how great is his beauty?" The beſt way to celebrate the praiſes of GOD, is that which Nehemiah uſeth, Nehem. ix. 5. "And bleſſed be thy "glorious name, which is exalted above all bleſſing "and praiſe." Whenever we ſpeak or think of GOD, we neceſſarily detract from his perfections; but even this neceſſity is glorious to him, and this ſpeaks his perfection, that the higheſt finite underſtanding muſt have imperfect thoughts of him.

We ſhould make up in reverence and veneration what we fall ſhort of in knowledge. Reverence is an acknowledgment of diſtance; by our reverence of the divine majeſty, we ſhould beſt awe our hearts, in a ſenſe of the diſtance which is between his infinite

nature

nature and perfection, and our finite apprehenſions. SERM. CLVI.
Worldly greatneſs will cauſe wonder, the thoughts of earthly majeſty will compoſe us to reverence; how much more ſhould thoſe excellencies which are beyond what we can imagine? Iſa. vi. you have there GOD repreſented "ſitting upon his throne," and the "ſeraphims about him," which are deſcribed to us as "having each ſix wings, and with twain "they cover their faces." Creatures of the brighteſt underſtanding, and the moſt exalted purity and holineſs, "cover their faces" in the preſence of GOD's glory, they chooſe rather to venerate GOD than look upon him.

II. This calls for humility and modeſty. The conſideration of GOD's unſearchable perfections ſhould make "the haughtineſs of man to ſtoop, and bring "down his proud looks, and GOD alone ſhould be "exalted." The thought of GOD's excellency ſhould abaſe us, and make us "vile in our own "eyes," it ſhould make all thoſe petty excellencies that we pride ourſelves in, to vaniſh and diſappear. "Thoſe treaſures of wiſdom and knowledge" which are in GOD, ſhould "hide pride from man." It ſhould hide thoſe little parts and gifts which we are ſo apt to glory in, as the ſun hides the ſtars. When we conſider GOD, we ſhould be ſo far from admiring ourſelves, that we ſhould with an humble thankfulneſs wonder that GOD ſhould regard ſuch inconſiderable nothings as we are, Pſal. viii. 1, 3, 4. "O "LORD our GOD, how excellent is thy name in all "the earth, who haſt ſet thy glory above the hea-"vens! When I conſider the heavens, the work of "thy fingers, the moon and the ſtars which thou "haſt ordained; what is man, that thou art mind-"ful of him? or the ſon of man, that thou viſiteſt

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" him? He that conſiders the glory of GOD, and the greatneſs of his works, will think ſo meanly of himſelf, that he will be aſtoniſhed that GOD ſhould mind him or viſit him. This is a noble ſtrain of humility in David, by which he acknowledgeth that the greateſt king of the earth, how conſiderable ſoever he may be in reſpect of men, is yet but a pitiful thing to GOD.

When we ſpeak to GOD, we ſhould do it with great humility, Eccleſ. v. 2, 3. "Let thy words be " few, for GOD is in heaven, and thou upon earth." We ſhould ſay to GOD, Job xxxvii. 19. " Teach " us what we ſhall ſay unto thee, for we cannot " order our ſpeech by reaſon of darkneſs." And when we think or ſpeak of him, we ſhould do it with great modeſty, we ſhould not raſhly pronounce or determine any thing concerning GOD. Simonides being aſked, what GOD was? deſired one day's time to conſider, then he deſired two, and then four. The more we think of GOD, the leſs peremptory ſhall we be in defining him. He that conſiders that GOD is incomprehenſible, will not pretend to know all the ways of infinite knowledge, and the utmoſt of infinite power, and all the reaſons of GOD's ways and providences. He that rightly values his own ſhort underſtanding, and the unlimited perfections of GOD, will not be apt to ſay, this GOD cannot do, this he cannot know, ſuch ways are not agreeable to his wiſdom. He that knows GOD and himſelf, will be modeſt in theſe caſes, he will ἐπέχειν, abſtain from all peremptory pronouncing in theſe matters; he conſiders that one man many times differs ſo much from another in knowledge and ſkill of working, that he can do thoſe things which another believes impoſſible: but we have pitiful thoughts

of GOD, if we think the difference between one man and another is any thing to the vaſt diſtance that is between the divine underſtanding and our ignorance, the divine power and our weakneſs, the wiſdom of GOD and the folly of men. SERM. CLVI.

III. The incomprehenſibleneſs of GOD's perfections calls for the higheſt degree of our affection. How ſhould we fear this great and glorious GOD! Pſal. xc. 11. "Who knoweth the power of thine anger? "even according to thy fear, ſo is thy wrath." Fear is the moſt infinite of all our paſſions, and fills us with the moſt endleſs jealouſy and ſuſpicions; GOD's wrath is greater than our fear, "according "to thy fear, ſo is thy wrath."

How ſhould we love him, when we are aſtoniſhed with admiration of GOD's goodneſs, and ſay, "how "great is thy goodneſs, and how great is thy beau- "ty? Behold, what manner of love the father hath "beſtowed upon us!" How great ſhould our love be to him! What manner of love ſhould we return to him!

This calls for the higheſt degree of our faith. With what confidence ſhould we rely upon him, "who is able to do for us exceeding abundantly "above what we can aſk or think!"

To conclude. This requires the higheſt degree of our ſervice: how ſhould our hearts be "enlarged to "run the ways of his commandments," who hath "laid up for us" ſuch things, "that eye hath "not ſeen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the "heart of man?"

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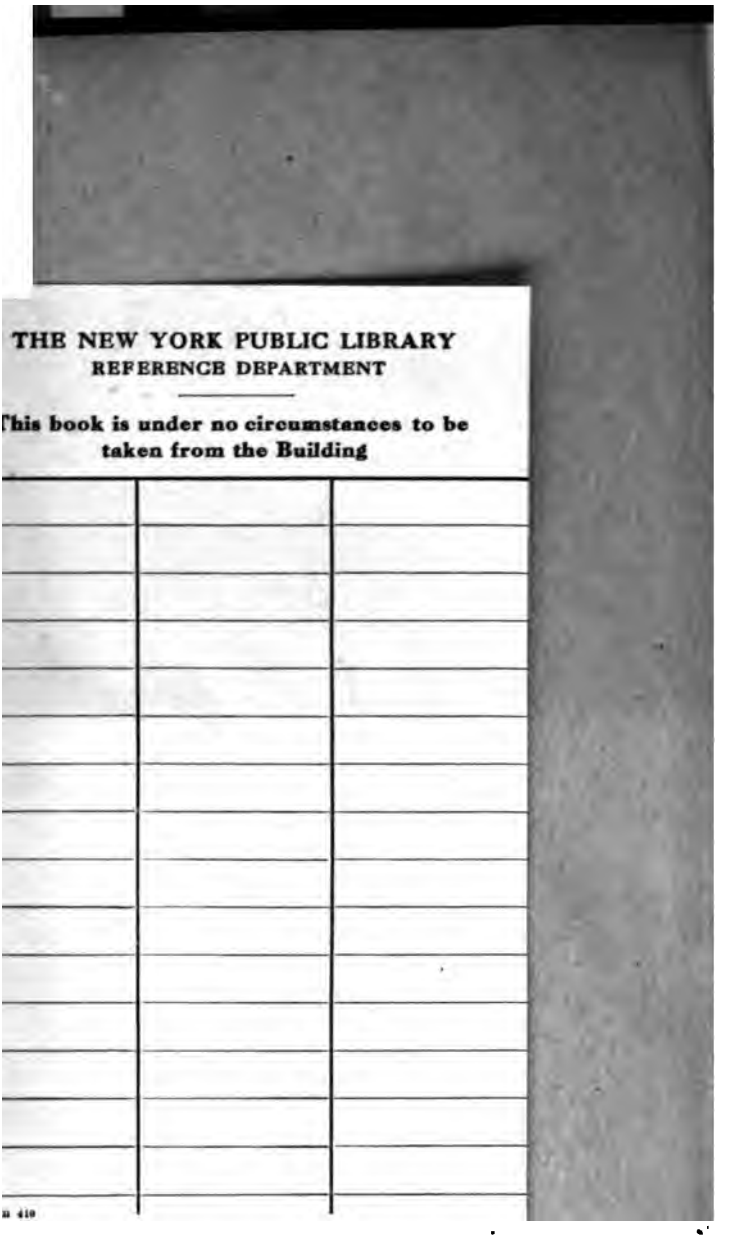
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